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## Becoming a Trauma Informed School Supporting Students with Behavioural Challenges

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# SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH BEHAVIOURAL CHALLENGES

## Abstract

The organization involved in this change process is an elementary school in Ontario. The Problem of Practice (PoP) addresses how to better support students within an inclusive elementary school who may or may not be formally identified with a special education exceptionality yet are unable to thrive due to their interfering behaviours. An exceptional pupil is “one whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program” (ON Ministry of Education, PART A: Legislation, Policy, and Funding, para.8). These students are demonstrating behaviours that vary from day to day and in levels of extremity. Some exhibited behaviours include: throwing objects, biting, hitting, kicking, punching, spitting on peers and adults in the building and destroying school property. These behaviours are examples of why students are removed from classrooms and potentially placed on a reduced day. Investigations have revealed that many of these students have experienced trauma in their lives, which may impact their ability to self-regulate and independently cope within the school environment. Currently, there are staff and families that do not have the experience and training to best support these students.

The Organization Improvement Plan (OIP) being presented shares the plan to expose staff, students and their families to three resources to prompt awareness and build knowledge on how to become trauma-informed. Recognizing the need to interact and engage fully with students, this plan seeks to integrate alternative strategies that mitigate interfering behaviours and will allow students to participate in more meaningful ways.

*Keywords:* Interfering Behaviours, Trauma-Informed, Asset/Strength-Based Approach, ACE Factors, Professional Learning.

# SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH BEHAVIOURAL CHALLENGES

## **Executive Summary**

The focus of this Organization Improvement plan is addressing a specific need at an elementary school in southwestern Ontario. This school serves close to two hundred students from kindergarten to grade eight collectively. It is situated in a small city with surrounding towns and rural areas. The school's catchment area includes students from subsidizing housing developments, the second stage residence housing unit and the local group homes, resulting in a collection of students with a variety of experiences and backgrounds.

The school and school board have mission and value statements indicating a commitment to serve the whole child and that diverse needs will be fully met within the teaching and learning environment. Within the school, some students demonstrate interfering behaviours, which cause them to not thrive in the school's programming to date. There are a growing number of questions surrounding the unique needs of these students, recognizing that their past experiences may be contributing to their inability to self-regulate their behaviours. It is increasingly clear that many students have had exposure to trauma in their lives, and the impact of this may be causing a barrier in their ability to thrive in schools. Trauma, for the purposes within the context here, is defined by Souers & Hall (2016) as an "extraordinary experience that overwhelms a student's ability to cope" (p.15).

This organizational improvement plan's Problem of Practice investigates a response to the inability of some students to cope when presented with routine requests. Some of the resulting behaviours may include hiding, punching, kicking, hitting, spitting, swearing, and destroying property. According to Burns (2019), students with a "history of trauma or toxic stress are more likely to experience higher rates of truancy, increased discipline referrals, more

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frequent suspensions and expulsions, decreased academic performance, and increased mental health challenges compared to students with no history of trauma” (p. v). As a result of interfering behaviours, some students cannot fully engage in the school program despite unique programming and being guided daily by support staff and special education resource teachers. These behaviours result in students being sent to the office, guided out of the classroom by support staff to a sensory room in the attempt to self-regulate, working within the school in alternate location one on one with support staff or a reduced day.

When investigating how to better support the students who demonstrate these challenging behaviours, one must look at how the staff responds to these students and how well-connected parents are to the school. This support comes with the growing awareness that most of the students discussed within this PoP have experienced some “Adverse Childhood Experiences” (ACE) (Feletti et al., 1998). To clarify what type of experiences possibly impact these children, Feletti et al. (1998) identified specific traumatic experiences and developed a checklist defining them. There are eight experiences listed, and the higher number of traumatic experiences, the more significant impact on the child. According to Blodgett (2012), students who experience multiple ACES are often subject to the “‘triple whammy’ effect in school, where attendance, behaviour and coursework are all affected” (p.20).

Staff at the school are caring, dedicated and committed educators. They are a highly skilled and a very motivated group of lifelong professional learners. However, the growing needs observed in students arriving at the school, some without any specific identifications, are becoming challenging. The teacher and support staff training is not thorough enough to adequately equip staff to respond and fully support these students with unique behavioural challenges. Many discussions in team meetings, staff meetings and with parents are dedicated to

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brainstorming and troubleshooting how to better serve these students. A growing interest in some of the work by Souers and Hall (2016) is being brought forward by the school board's Mental Health Lead. Souers and Hall (2016) suggest that recalibration is needed on how one views destructive behaviours. These observations result in the need for the school staff and parents to become more trauma-sensitive with an asset-based approach and to build more awareness of mental health needs in the students.

Specific resources are proposed to support the work, build capacity and become more trauma-aware. These resources will support a change in school culture through professional learning for both staff and parents to support students with behavioural challenges. The resources include the Wisconsin Trauma-Sensitive Schools Fidelity Tool (WTSSF) (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2020), the School Mental Health ASSIST (SMH- ASSIST) (2013) Tiered Support Model, and finally, work with the Sanctuary Model (Bloom, 2007).

Bloom's model offers trauma-specific treatment approaches, where Bloom (2007) believes that our "growing knowledge about the short and long-term effects of chronic stress and repetitive trauma requires a shift in the way we view all human problematic behavior" (p. 13).

Using these resources will guide staff and parents to recalibrate their thinking, engage more proactively and support students with behavioural needs more mindfully.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Problem of Practice**

St. David's Elementary Catholic school [anonymized] serves approximately 200 students from kindergarten through grade eight. The school is in South Western Ontario and part of Board X [anonymized]. Board X has vision and mission statements indicating their schools are diverse, inclusive and equitable and state that "effective leadership encourages and promotes a collaborative, multi-dimensional approach to equity and inclusive education" (Board X, 2020).

The goal of a Catholic community is to ensure that staff, students, parents, and service organizations feel appreciated, valued and welcomed. The principal's role is to ensure that all students and staff are within a safe learning environment and adhere to inclusive, equity and education policies that follow health and safety protocols.

### **Organizational Context**

St. David's School is in a city with a population of approximately 30,000 people. The city would be considered stable due to a strong tourism and arts industry creating a robust economy. There are growing numbers of new home subdivisions, retail and commercial developments. There are several large trade companies and factories. The city has an affordable housing need. The school is located within a lower socio-economic area of the city with subsidized housing, group homes and a second stage residence for women and children who have experienced violence.

Connections to behaviour difficulties have been noted regarding the students who live in one of these three locations. It has been revealed that it is these same children who have experienced some form of trauma. Anecdotal conversations with parents, group home staff, students and their support team indicate exposure to some of the following difficult experiences; domestic violence (experienced or witnessed), an incarcerated parent, maltreatment, nutrition

and sleep interruptions. Ko et al. (2008), summarizes the ideas of Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) by stating that “low-income and ethnic minority youths are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of trauma because they disproportionately experience violence and academic failure” (p. 398). Certainly, trauma responses are not present in all these students. However, a trend has been observed.

At St. David’s school, there are 12 educational assistants (EAs) supporting students, some with special needs. The three students identified with a special education exceptionality account for three EAs in the school. The remaining 9 EAs generally support students with behavioural needs, some of whom have formal identifications. These 9 EAs are classified as Intensive Support (IS) EAs and have specific training with Non-Violent Crisis Intervention (NVCi) and behaviour support plan development. Board X staffs three full-time Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) leads who serve the seventeen schools in the whole board. Beginning with a referral process, the school requests EA support based on the specific criteria focused on challenging student behaviours. The school makes a request, particularly when student behaviours are considered a safety risk, to others or themselves, and which inhibits the student’s learning or that of others. The ABA lead works closely with the EAs, Special Educational Resource Teacher (SERT), and principal to initially collect data to determine what may be causing the behaviour. Data is documented on an ABC data collection form. Pratt and Dubie (2017) share that ABC refers to: “*Antecedent*—the events, action, or circumstances that occur before a behaviour; *Behaviour*—The behaviour; and *Consequence*—the action or response that follows the behavior” (p.1). The ABC data form is an assessment tool, and the information gathered will help develop a clearer understanding of antecedents and develop a positive behaviour support plan.

The 12 educational assistants, the Special Educational Resource Teacher (SERT) and school principal, make up the team that consistently supports students with behavioural challenges. The team provides modifications/accommodations, and designs behaviour support plans to assist in planning for students with behavioural needs. Students within the school who have difficulty fully participating in the school day often present disrespectful behaviours, refuse to participate, complete disengagement and finally, violent and aggressive behaviours. The behaviour is problematic because our goal is to have all students in their classrooms accessing the curriculum and meeting social and emotional milestones alongside their peers. Other behaviours that staff observe can include: throwing chairs/objects, biting, hitting, kicking, punching, pulling hair and spitting on peers and adults in the building and defacing school property. These more violent behaviours are why students are removed from classrooms and or their length of time at school is reduced.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights indicates that “everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory” (Article 26 (1)). However, Board X is currently developing a protocol identified as the “reduced day protocol” (Board X, 2020). A letter explains the protocol to parents as a temporary measure of a recommended reduced day since their child struggles to regulate themselves and routinely is unable to calm down and re-engage in the classroom activities. It shares that the escalation of behaviour must be addressed and strategies developed in conjunction with health providers, then allowing the school to better program and meet the well-being needs of the student. The reduced day document is a protocol that is signed by the Superintendent of Education for Board X.

Inclusive education, as identified by Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, is based on the principles of "acceptance and inclusion of all students" (p.4). Students "see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured, and all individuals are respected" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 4). Fully inclusive education systems offer challenges in supporting all learners, particularly for students demonstrating complex behaviours. Our responsibility is to realize the shortfalls in practices and students' lived experiences that might contribute to student behaviours.

Within the school environment, the staff's responsibility includes managing both curriculum expectations and student behaviours. Students spend many hours each day in school in the presence of adults who care for and observe their interactions with academics and peers. The school setting offers opportunities to help students practice and learn social-emotional skills and mentally healthy habits within an inclusive and caring environment (School Mental Health-Assist, 2019). However, some factors need to be considered as the school team works to embrace these opportunities. Teacher training organizations and faculties of education are generally focused on academics. Typically, specific training and resources for teaching students with behavioural challenges is minimal. Ofsted (2008) states that "it is often argued that teachers lack the necessary knowledge and skills to work with such students in inclusive classrooms" (p. 369).

Board X works to implement some professional learning in positive reinforcement strategies that is often in response to specific students and as time allows. Other factors could impact teachers' ability to support students that struggle to regulate their behaviours. According to McGoey et al., (2014) "lack of training, support, time and resources may negatively affect a teacher's ability and motivation to accurately implement behavior interventions" (p.387).

One of the school leader's roles is to assist and support staff and teachers in increasing their knowledge and understanding of students' needs and altering practices to decrease challenging behaviours. Considering a skills approach to effective leadership performance asks that people think differently about complex systems and identify with possible strategies for change, which is an essential goal within this change implementation plan. Developing an awareness of the effects of experienced trauma on students needs to be considered. As relationships with students and their families grow, a deeper understanding of previous experiences that may affect the student's capabilities and challenging behaviours may surface.

Being a trauma-informed school will assist in the school staff's capacity and serve students affected by trauma in a more understanding and empathetic manner. Overstreet and Chafouleas refer to the work of Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, and Santos (2015) as they identify trauma-informed schools as "educational environments that are created and that are responsive to the needs of trauma-exposed youth through the implementation of effective practices and systems-change strategies" (p. 1). Levine and Kline (2007) state that "educators who are unaware of a child's trauma history or its impact may aggravate the situation by holding a child to unrealistic expectations or misinterpreting the child's symptoms as indicative of bad conduct or another disorder" (p. 252). This critical understanding of being proactive and working as a team to offer trauma-responsive support is essential to St. David's Elementary school goal of becoming a trauma-informed school.

At St. David's, staff aspire to meet all students' needs and celebrate successes, both academic and development social/emotional milestones. The current state of aggressive and sometimes violent behaviours towards peers, staff and school property indicates that there is work for the school team to do.



Polirstok (2015), summarizes the work of Scheuermann and Hall (2012), “changing inappropriate student behaviour requires changing the teacher’s behaviour” (p. 21). This change is not an easy one for some staff. Some do not yet realize the potential value of a more flexible, positive and proactive awareness of student/family/teacher interactions to develop relationships. Developing these relationships and adopting an asset or strength-based approach in our work with students will positively affect student behaviour. Sutherland, Conroy, Abrams and Vo, (2010) share that “many young children who exhibit problem behaviours simply have not learned social competence skills or are not in environments that support their use” (p. 74). The work at St. David’s school will build these skills in students.

The school team will request support from one of the three Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) leads, who support this work in the School Board. There are some limited training opportunities and infrequent class support by the ABA leads with staff to try and promote positive reinforcement in hopes of strengthening the outcome of positive behaviours. This work is challenging but valuable; the ABA lead is stretched very thin, and their support is limited and inconsistent. This lack of consistent professional learning for staff results in well-intentioned behaviour support planning but does not become embedded into practices. McCahill, Healy, Lydon and Ramey (2014) state that “research suggests that staff members in educational settings may not have the requisite levels of expertise or support to implement behavioural assessment procedures and design corresponding behavior support plans” (p. 479). The mission for staff skill development will involve strengthening relationships, building awareness of student need, and increasing positive reinforcements.

When students exhibit extreme behaviours, it takes a toll on staff. Galand, Lecocq, and Philippot (2007) refer to a “longitudinal survey by Burke, Greenglass, and Schwarzer (1996)

who found that student disruptive behaviour is the strongest predictor of burnout among teachers” (p. 466). According to Koenig (2014), some teachers can experience compassion fatigue which he states are “natural emotional and behavioural reactions that occur from the knowledge of someone close experiencing a traumatic event, combined with the stress caused by the desire to help the traumatized individual” (p. 9). The exposure and ongoing daily support provided by staff to the students in the school demonstrating these challenging behaviours has an impact. It is challenging work that can look different for each student. Staff members demonstrate a variety of responses following student violence. Some staff are shaky, sometimes very emotional and crying, feeling guilt for not being proactive or having responded differently, evoking feelings of anger and a sense of unjustness for those harmed or for property damaged. These responses are legitimate. Follow up practices include completing incident reports, along with an opportunity to debrief as a team to unpack and determine the next steps.

### **Leadership Position and Lens Statement**

As a school administrator leading a school with growing needs, and a wide range of other expectations, managing students with challenging behaviours can be overwhelming. Wiseman (2005) shares that “this idea of one person (e.g., the school principal) to assume responsibility for the functioning of an organization is ludicrous” (p. 13). It is a challenging expectation; however, being the school leader means working closely with students who cannot stay regulated and control their behavioural outbursts, both verbally and physically. Students join us with diverse experiences, cultures, homes and parenting backgrounds. The responsibility of the leader is vast; however implementing a change plan to address the needs of students who are not thriving is necessary. The OIP is one that requires an authentic and collaborative action plan and asks staff to recognize the injustices that some students are experiencing due to trauma and are often

further exasperated by our response to their challenging behaviours. Responding to the PoP through a social justice lens allows the change leader and staff to develop a plan that will help to eradicate these injustices and inequities (Bogotch & Shields, 2014). The OIP will be supported using authentic and transformational leadership approaches and likely to find success with the staff members at St. David's due to the existing positive relationships and culture at St. David's school.

**Transformational Leadership.** Northouse (2016) explains transformational leadership as leadership that is “concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals” (p.161). The change leader instigates change, Northouse (2016) shares that “the leaders and followers are bound together in the change process” (p.162). St. David's staff members are committed to student success and demonstrate a moral purpose in their work. Shared learning opportunities with staff will build an understanding of the impact of trauma on students. Being a more trauma-informed school will better serve all students.

Burns (1978) introduces the term “followership” (p.18), which is a very valuable approach. Leadership conversations often focus on the leader's work and how they are going to develop plans and manipulate situations to achieve their leadership goals. However, within the description of transformational, Burns (1978) “links the roles of leadership and followership” (p.18). He envisions leaders as “those that tap the motives of the followers in order to better reach the goals of the leaders and followers” (Burns, 1978, p. 18). This link is well suited for St. David's staff as idea-sharing, valuing opinions, and collaborative work on school initiatives is the norm. St. David's is a small school with limited support available. A team approach is a routine when collectively stepping in and assisting when a student is having an outburst. Additional back up from staff is often required to support the student in need and restore order.

Developing relationships with staff allows for the continual demonstration of an open and collaborative approach in planning school initiatives. Katz, Dack and Malloy, 2016, state that “educators cannot overemphasize the importance of positive relationships for influencing learning and bringing about important change in a school” (p. 44). In doing this, staff develop a sense of trust in the leader as they continually observe authenticity in the ongoing commitment to students and intentionally serving them.

Staff are continually working to creatively support students by trying new approaches, using one another’s input and learned experiences in the planning process. Consistent messaging and ongoing actions will demonstrate the commitment to serving students in any way possible, continue to build trust, relationships and support the transformational change plan. Shields (2018) states that “leaders must develop a certain level of trust among those with whom they work and demonstrate that their actions are consistent with their words” (p. 17). Creating these conditions to encourage staff to alter practices in the work with students is necessary, as is a well-formulated change process plan.

Planning initiatives where staff are not a part of the process, with no solicited feedback being captured, usually results in a failed change plan. The arrival of a new administrator into the school naturally invites changes. A high rate of administrator turn over at St.Davids has resulted in initiatives that started without a thoroughly planned change process and which were not well communicated— ultimately resulting in some failed change initiatives and frustrated staff.

Ongoing conversations at staff and team meetings and identifying the needs of students will support a new change plan vision.

Greene (2019) communicates the following:

understanding why a kid is exhibiting challenging behaviour is one of the essential parts of helping him or her. Challenging behaviour occurs when the demands of the environment exceed a kid's capacity to respond adaptively. That being the case, the first goal is to identify the skills that are lagging in the kid you're trying to understand and help. (p. 1)

Communicating Greene's message to staff will be done intentionally and honestly, with the opportunity for feedback and a place for everyone's voice. Staff have witnessed this collaborative approach in previous work developing the School Improvement Plan (SIP), using data and teacher feedback to determine student needs and developing a relevant and manageable SIP.

The Setting Direction pillar within the Ontario Leadership Framework (2013) states that to successfully build a "shared vision the school leader should establish, in collaboration with staff, students, and other stakeholders, an overall sense of purpose or vision for work in their schools to which they are all strongly committed" (p. 12). The SIP development was a positive experience and may encourage staff to work openly and flexibly for the proposed change. Cawsey, Deszca and Ingols (2016) indicate that exposure to moderate amounts of positive change may result in those within to find an upcoming change to be less "unsettling and less risky" (p .234).

The continued building of both relationships and trust with staff will be strengthened by authentically modelling the proposed plan when supporting the students and families. Working collaboratively with staff to build a deeper understanding of students and striving to support them through a change in practice will build capacity. Engels et al., (2008) state that a "positive or 'good' school culture is considered as one in which meaningful staff development and

enhanced student learning are practised” (p.160). The school environment values continued learning to improve practice and serve students more effectively.

Staff want students to be regulated, and they work hard to support their students when they are not. Students in a state of being unregulated and demonstrating difficult and sometimes dangerous behaviours are unnerving. Although staff may be exhibiting shakiness, elevated heart rates, and possibly tending to an injury from a kick, punch or scratch, there is most often some comment of empathy and concern for the child within the conversation. These demonstrations of care by staff supports the belief that there can be effective work alongside them to improve the understanding of how traumatic experiences can result in challenging behaviours. Staff want to help these children, and in planning a change process for the work ahead, transformational leadership will drive this process. This approach meshes the authentic leadership underpinnings observed in staff through their openness to improve their practices in serving students.

According to Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) the authentic transformational leadership model is one that “provides a more reasonable and realistic concept of self and is connected to friends, family, and community whose welfare may be more important to oneself than one’s own” (p. 186). Neider and Schriesheim (2011) summarize the work of scholars Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), in stating that “authenticity as simply an extension of transformational leadership” (p.1146). Ilies, et al., (2005) consider “authentic leadership as a root concept that underlies the positive aspects of charismatic, transformational, spiritual, and ethical leadership theories” (p.374). The similar qualities within both models invite the opportunity for both to be considered for the change plan implementation.

**Authentic Leadership.** Building this type of learning and working environment is more easily done when there is an ethic of authenticity present. When followers join their leader in a

change plan focussed on improvement and care for students, it is because a sense of trust has been developed. Change leaders that model the expectations in their daily work with students, parents, outside services and staff develop a sense of trust and authenticity. These expectations include, giving and expecting respect, being honest and compassionate. Northouse, (2016) indicates that an authentic leadership approach requires “leaders to do what is right and good for their followers and society” (p.206).

Northouse shares that upheaval in our society has created a demand for authentic leadership. As a result, Northouse (2016) believes people are searching for “bona fide leadership that they can trust and are honest and good” (p.195). Eagly (2005) views authentic leadership as a “relational one and created together by the leaders and followers” (p.196), a process where “leaders affect followers and followers affect leaders” (p. 196). The work moving forward at St. David’s will be reciprocal and include some trial and error in becoming more trauma-sensitive and altering interactions with all students, particularly those who demonstrate difficulty with regulating themselves. Leaders and those who follow will be working together in the service of our students.

### **Leadership Problem of Practice**

Meeting the needs of learners can be challenging, particularly for students demonstrating complex behaviours. The problem of practice is that some students at St. David’s elementary school demonstrate interfering behaviours that are not fully understood. These students are not thriving in a fully inclusive school environment. As educators, the vision for students is to follow through on staff requests and expectations and to ask questions or share concerns if they do not understand or feel overwhelmed by the demand. Without addressing this problem of practice, meeting the visions and expectations of educators will continue to decline.

All students deserve a right to education. The current approach needs adjusting as some students are spending limited time in the classroom and school environment. According to the Ministry of Education (2014), as set out in *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*, “ensuring equity is a central goal of Ontario’s publicly funded education system” (p.3). Therein the fundamental principle shared is that “every student should have the opportunity to succeed personally and academically, regardless of background, identity or personal circumstances” (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 3).

The main goal of this inquiry is for staff is to become better informed and support students who exhibit extreme behaviours in response to routine demands/expectations within the school environment.

In the school environment, staff learn student’s strengths and weaknesses, as do the administration regarding staff members. Assessment information about people’s skillsets and areas needing extra support to improve practice are gathered through observations and conversations. Offering professional learning and resources to serve the needs of students with behaviour needs is an area that is lacking and will be addressed.

### **Framing the Problem of Practice**

Within traditional classroom management styles, there is a longstanding norm of expected compliance and respect for the classroom teacher. Teachers experience issues when they expect immediate compliance and assume questions as an act of defying the teacher’s authority. As Greene (2008) points out “there are a number of children who cannot seem to function well within the classroom, don’t seem to respect authority, aren’t responding to the school discipline program” (p.5). Greene (2008) suggests that “kids are not robots... the work is hard, messy, uncomfortable and requires teamwork, patience and tenacity, especially as the work



also involves questioning conventional wisdom and practices” (p.xi). Learning to develop a change in mindset to a more flexible approach with students will be encompassed within the proposed plan.

Additional resources and learning opportunities for staff will broaden teacher practice and develop the responsibility to know their students through building relationships, understanding that traumatization can change behaviours in challenging ways and impact students’ social, emotional, and academic skills. Conversations often reveal the difficulties these children have previously or are presently experiencing in their homes. Approaching traumatized students with a positive mindset and an awareness of how human interactions can impact behaviours will decrease the number of them responding aggressively and putting up barriers. Polirstok and Gottlieb (2006) state that a “positive classroom climate and environments in the school including routines and structure are critical for at-risk children to learn how to function at school” (p. 354).

According to Rutter et al., (1999), as summarized by Zarse et al. (2019) “it has long been known that behavioural problems in children can result from maltreatment and/or deprivation” (p.3). The growing awareness of students living in at-risk environments and with current or past trauma encourages the investigation into the effects on the students and those working with children to be better informed. Kaffman (2009) states that “the incidence of childhood maltreatment has been steadily increasing over the past 3 decades” (p.1). Dr. Kaffman states that “in the absence of effective interventions, maltreated children go on to develop a host of behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and medical sequelae that are chronic and in many cases refractory to treatment” (p.1). This research supports the call for a trauma-informed learning plan.

Swartz et al. (2011) confirms that Canadian children have high rates of trauma exposure. Of the nearly 10,000 Canadians who participated in a survey documenting past maltreatment experiences, 21% of females and 31% of males had been physically abused, and 13% of females and 4% of males had been sexually abused. A 2008 national survey found 85,440 cases of children being physically abused, sexually abused, neglected, emotionally maltreated or exposed to intimate partner violence. Based on substantiated child welfare investigations, 1.4% of Canadian children experienced significant maltreatment. (p. 3)

Defining or attaching a common term to children who have been exposed to trauma, is not easy. It should be noted that interpersonal trauma is the result of victimization on a child. According to D'Andrea, Ford, Stolbach & van der Kolk (2012) "children experience many forms of traumatic interpersonal adversity in addition to physical and sexual abuse" (p.187). D'Andrea et al. (2012) offer that "unfortunately, victimization in childhood may take many forms, including assault, abduction, bullying, and neglect" (p.188).

According to Dr. van der Kolk (2005) research has shown that "traumatic childhood experiences are not only extremely common, they also have a profound impact on many different areas of functioning" (p. 2). Van der Kolk (2005) shares evidence that children who have experienced trauma will often demonstrate an unreasonable response to a routine request and can present with an "over- and under reactivity manifestation on multiple levels: emotional, physical, behavioral, cognitive and relational" (p. 10). Children with experienced trauma can have "fearful, enraged, or avoidant emotional reactions to minor stimuli that would have no significant impact on secure children" (p. 11). As seen in the work with students who demonstrate extreme behaviour reactions, coming back down and regulating can be difficult. Van der Kolk (2005) confirms that after having "become aroused these children have a great deal of difficulty

restoring homeostasis and returning to baseline” (p. 11). The school team needs to become better-informed in this area—reframing their work with students to understand that what may seem like a routine request for some students will be perceived differently for those students having experienced trauma.

Administering to disruptive behaviour problems in schools is not an uncommon occurrence. In a 2017 survey conducted regarding violence in schools by the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA), “nearly nine-in-ten teachers have experienced or witnessed violence or harassment in schools” (p.2). The survey also reported that “26% of Catholic teachers had to take time off work because of mental health effects resulting from school violence” (p.3). According to Abebe and Hailemariam (2007), there is an increase in behaviour difficulties in schools, and they believe that “teachers seem to be unprepared to deal with the problem and the standard classroom management strategies teachers rely on does not appear to be working” (p. 3). Providing learning opportunities for staff to be more trauma-informed would be a valuable commitment to our students and allow a more sustainable and unified approach to decreasing challenging student behaviours.

### **PESTE Analysis**

Within a change process, it is necessary to consider the outside factors that can impact the plan. There are environmental forces that drive the change plan. These external happenings provoke the need for change. Cawsey et al. (2016) sum these up with the acronym PESTE and identify these factors as “political, economic, social, technological and ecological/environmental factors” (p. 6). The PESTE factors for potential influence concerning the PoP are below.

**Political.** The many facets of concern regarding students with behavioural challenges not being fully engaged in the classroom and school includes input from collective bargaining

agents. The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) calls for increased teacher training. ETFO's (2017) call to action addresses their belief that there is a "critical lack of support for students facing serious behavioural issues that can lead to violent incidents in classrooms" (p. 1). Their outlined recommendations include requesting the government to appropriately fund special education programs, organizing support to build capacity for children's mental health services, assisting with school board compliance, and adhering to health and safety policies. The federation's call to action report states that "education workers have one of the highest levels of Lost Time Injuries caused by workplace violence according to Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB) statistics in the elementary schools" (ETFO, 2017, p. 1).

**Economic.** Government economic decisions affect schools, students and staff. As budgets are laid out and job losses in the educational sector realized, many schools get left with a human support deficit. According to the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) (2019), the union for many Educational Assistants in Ontario, the 2019 government cut \$235 million in funding to special education. This cut in funds means the loss of front-line people supporting children at risk and with complex needs. The support staff who work with students with behaviour challenges are a critical key to their success in the school environment. Most often, the educational assistants are the staff members who are more readily able to connect quickly and form relationships with these students. Students rely on these consistent adults who build an understanding of antecedents affecting behaviours. When cutbacks happen in schools and support staff are stretched thin, this becomes a factor that influences the work to mitigate interfering student behaviours.

**Social.** The School Mental Health ASSIST (SMH-ASSIST) (2019) website and the Leading Mentally Healthy Schools (SMH-ASSIST, 2019) document are available resources to

help support the development of understanding and strategies in supporting teacher learning. The SMH-ASSIST is a provincial implementation support team developed to aid Ontario school boards in promoting student well-being and mental health. The SMH-ASSIST document is designed as a guide to be used in conjunction with *Supporting Minds: An Educator's Guide to Promoting Students' Mental Health and Well-being* (Ontario Ministry of Education, OME, 2013). The guide is a resource to support “enhancing the capacity of school leaders and staff to support the mental health and well-being of students” (OME, 2013, p. 9). It indicates that educators are in a likely position to support those students presenting with mental health challenges. The report states that “with professional learning to increase our own mental health literacy, we can enhance our ability to recognize early signs of behaviour-emotional problems to select and support appropriate strategies and to help students and families access needed services” (OME, 2013, p. 9). The development of support at a Provincial level, asking us to increase our learning of how to understand and serve our students struggling with complex behaviours more clearly indicates that this is a need.

**Technological.** As leaders embrace the impact of technological change, it does not arrive without some effect on the school environment and change plan. There is a need to be aware of technological trends and how they impact students and their families. Trends can be used for good and propel positive and meaningful engagements or create some anxiety and difficulties. Access to technology in an equitable sense is a consideration for schools that serve students and families who live in a lower socioeconomic status. While many do have access to technological devices to support learning in the home, some do not, which may present a disadvantage. This inequity is a consideration for staff in assigning work to be researched and completed by the student at home, as well as the possible positive effects of appropriate and possibly increased

access to technology at the school as a tool for learning that may mitigate students' behaviours. Shapley, Sheehan, Maloney and Caranikas-Walker (2011) hosted a study that provided one-to-one technology for students to support their school learning. Within the study was a control group school that was identified as a high-needs school, as the families had incomes below the poverty line. As a measure of engagement, the study also included a comparison of the amount of student disciplinary instances (e.g., removal of a student from the regular academic program for a full school day) at control schools. Results reported a "statistically significant difference indicating less frequent student disciplinary incidents at treatment schools compared to control" (Shapley et al., 2011, p. 308). Understanding this measure of engagement offers a potential opportunity to consider the value of providing technology to support student learning, especially those that may be experiencing some of the ACE factors within the home.

**Ecological/Environmental.** A United States nationwide study of over 6000 adolescents reported that 62% of youths experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime. These events included interpersonal violence, serious accidents or injuries, natural disaster, and the death of a loved one; 19 percent have experienced three or more such events (McLaughlin, 2019). According to Pelcovitz and Kaplan (1996), the "past decade has seen a significant increase in our understanding of the unique impact that trauma may have on the developmental trajectory of children and adolescents" (p. 1). Students are walking into classrooms having experienced trauma and possibly with post-traumatic distress disorder (PTSD). McLaughlin (2019) defines PTSD as a "debilitating and often chronic mental disorder that develops in some children and adolescents following exposure to a traumatic event" (p. 2). Understanding the effects of PTSD would lead us to believe that a growing number of students being served in

schools have experienced some significant challenges in their lives. These challenges impact their ability to function within the school in a way that we would assume to be “typical”.

Students demonstrate a variety of behaviours in the classroom, and managing them is an expectation of the classroom teacher. Having developed intentional classroom management strategies should be within the repertoire of the classroom teacher. Despite having access to professional development on classroom management strategies, some of the more extreme student behaviours are not going to be met through the teacher practice development. There is much work to be done in this area.

The school board currently dedicates a considerable amount of human resources and financial commitments to schools supporting students with behavioural challenges. There are several educational assistants hired to serve these students as well as resources purchased and locations organized (sensory rooms) within the school to assist in supporting their needs. However, the fundamental cause of these behaviours is not addressed, which is experiences of trauma. It is trauma that impacts the mental health of the young population. According to McGorry and Birlson (2009), about 50% of mental health issues begin by age 14, and approximately 75% have onset by age 24. This indicates a need for more intervention and prevention. The factors discussed in the OIP include getting to the fundamental causes and how trauma and mental health issues affect students and subsequently build barriers to successful school life. The SMH ASSIST resource offers strategies to assist staff to recognize the triggers and signs of mental health in students and direct those students and families to the appropriate social services support. To be preventative and reduce violence within the school the administrator will appeal to the Board to increase hiring and training of staff, so they are well equipped to look for signs of mental health concerns. A final factor to support a solution to the

PoP is encouraging the use of professional learning funds to aid staff to become trauma-informed.

### **External Data**

Students' actions in the classroom and ensuring a safe and vigorous learning environment are a priority for schools, and this can be a challenging aspect of a teacher's work. In the OECD document, the *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First Results from TALIS*, are results from the new Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD, 2019). The survey offers an internationally comparative view of teaching and learning conditions from 260,000 teachers in 15,000 schools across 48 countries and economies. The evidence indicates that "one teacher in four in most countries lose at least 30% of lesson time to disruptive student behaviour or administrative tasks, and some teachers lose more than half" (OECD, 2019, p. 10). OECD indicates that across multiple countries, 60% of teachers are reporting that classroom disturbances are hindering learning and poses significant challenges to engage in effective teaching practices.

This data supports the need for increased knowledge for educators on how to better serve all students and allow them to remain in the classroom and engaged in learning and social experiences.

### **Guiding Questions Emerging from the Problem of Practice**

The problem of practice addressed by this organizational improvement plan is better understand and support students who demonstrate challenging behaviours and are not thriving in the fully inclusive school environment. The exploration into this problem has generated further areas of inquiry related to complex behaviours in our students. In considering the impact of trauma on students, the following questions for inquiry emerged:



**Line of Inquiry 1.** Would increasing staff professional development on the effects of trauma on young children, and altering the practice with students potentially decrease challenging behaviours? To clarify what type of experiences possibly impact these children, Feletti et al. (1998) identified specific traumatic experiences. These experiences are called Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), and they include:

1. Substance abuse
2. Parental separation or divorce
3. Mental illness in the home
4. Witnessing domestic violence
5. Suicidal household member
6. Death of a parent or another loved one
7. Parental incarceration
8. Experience of abuse (e.g., psychological, physical, or sexual) or neglect (e.g., emotional or physical) (Feletti et al, 1998, p. 20)

Through his research, Dr. Blodgett (2012) has determined that ACEs have “powerful negative effect on students’ readiness to learn” (p. 20). Blodgett (2012) shares that students who experience multiple ACES are often subject to the “triple whammy” (p.20) effect in school, where attendance, behaviour and coursework are all affected.

**Line of Inquiry 2.** The parents’ role is another question that arose through the investigation of students with challenging behaviours who are not thriving in the school environment. As stated by Kohl, Lengua & McMahon (2000) in Drolet et al. (2007), “direct parental involvement in a child’s learning process and environment, especially when the child is at a young age, is known to have a beneficial effect on the latter’s social skills by reducing

problem behaviours” (p.438). According to Kovacs and Devlin (1998), children’s behaviour can be revealed in either internalizing or externalizing behaviour. These externalizing behaviours are the ones that disrupt the school environment and the reason the PoP is being investigated. In this type of problem behaviour, it is noted by Roesner, Eccles & Strobel (1998) that “the context of school may influence both academic and emotional outcomes” (p.153). Will working alongside parents and developing a collaborative relationship and supporting the students and family decrease challenging behaviours at school? Can a difference be made through schools supporting families that struggle with poverty, unemployment, possible parenting gaps in their ability to guide and best support their children to develop the skills to self-regulate and fully participate in the school environment? Gaps in parenting skills can contribute to challenging behaviours in children. Parenting gaps are explored, looking at the impact of parenting styles and the impact on child behaviours. According to Aunola & Nurmi (2005), “authoritarian parenting, characterized as high behavioral control (or, in some conceptualizations, harsh and punitive control) but low affection, and permissive parenting, typified by low behavioral control, are related to various kinds of maladjustment, such as withdrawn behavior, low peer affiliation, and conduct disorders” (p.1145).

Can respectful engagement and possible gap-filling opportunities with parents create greater student success where students develop the ability to self-manage their behaviours, resulting in less time out of the classroom?

**Line of Inquiry 3.** A final line of inquiry presented asks, can teacher’s professional knowledge be increased to more effectively manage the classroom environment and proactively decrease challenging student behaviours? A look at using a strength-based approach with all students would be a preventative and positive move. Brownlee, Rawana and MacArthur, (2012)

state that “schools can further contribute to student mental well-being by adopting a strengths perspective model” (p. 1). An asset/strength-based approach using the model suggested may provide teachers with constructive knowledge to embed in their daily practice and support all students, especially those who demonstrate complex behaviours. Brownlee et al., (2012) suggest “that by engaging an entire class, or indeed an entire school, in a dialogue of strengths, the concept of strengths can become a part of the culture of the school and lead to a positive school environment” (p. 1). Considerations for gaps in teacher professional development and building knowledge in this area will help build a strong practice in aiding students experiencing emotional and behavioural needs within the inclusive classroom setting. Polirstok and Gottlieb’s (2006) evaluation suggests that positive behavioural intervention training for teachers can significantly impact school success for students not having developed prosocial behaviours. The data collected indicated a “long-term causal relationship between teachers’ ability to manage students’ behaviour and referrals for student misbehaviours” (Polirstok & Gottlieb, 2006, p. 355).

### **Leadership-Focused Vision for Change**

The change process calls leaders to mindfully plan and consider many factors that may interrupt the process. The most direct impact plan to support students and mitigate behaviour challenges is the teachers’ ability. Therefore, it is essential to offer opportunities to develop professional knowledge to understand students’ unique needs and use a sensitive and preventative approach. Building a rapport and trusting relationship with people who may have care and support needs is a fundamental foundation for working in a strengths-based way (Baron and Stanley, 2019). Professional learning will encourage staff to use strength/asset-based approaches with students and strategies to create a trauma-sensitive school.

**Envisioned Future State**

An increased understanding of students needs and how staff interactions can positively or negatively impact student behaviours is the goal. Taking a strength-based approach versus a deficit approach when working with students improves student behaviours. The strengths-based educational model, according to Lopez and Louis (2007), “represents a return to basic educational principles that emphasize the positive aspects of student effort and achievement, as well as human strengths” (p. 2). The promotion of a strength-based approach is identified in the resource; *Fostering Resilient Learners-Strategies for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom* (Souers & Hall, 2016). This book has many valuable learnings within it. A key message is that adopting a strength-based approach with students can adjust our views about destructive student behaviours and identify what students may need to “break negative cycles” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 15). Staff members who focus on a management style that includes the need for immediate student compliance will benefit from this learning.

Professional learning about using a strength-based approach with students at St. David’s school will be embedded into the trauma sensitivity learning. The work with staff on the WTSSF tool and crowdsourcing information gathering will be an entry point in the learning process. As the leader of this work, the beginning stage will be highlighting to staff that our language could be altered to have more of a strength or asset-based focus. I will identify the specific language and nuances used in routine exchanges between staff and students that could be slightly altered to be more strength-based. For example, a common verbal exchange between a teacher and student that begins with “you never finish your homework!” could be adjusted to “let’s talk about what homework can you manage”; this verbal exchange is more preventative and using a strength-based approach. I will ask staff to be reflective of the language they use with students, is

there language that should be avoided? Is the language being used focused on assets and using a positive stance? The goal of this professional learning is to develop an asset-based schema in staff and for this to be evident during exchanges with students. As the change leader, this asset-based common language will be modelled in many instances and in daily verbal exchanges at the school. To make this concept visible in the school and to support this shift, examples will be present on bulletin boards, mission statements, and messaging going out to staff and the school community. It is not a change plan that asks for a rerouting of entire teaching practices but rather an extension of current knowledge.

### **Priorities for Change**

It is challenging to meet the needs of all learners, particularly for students demonstrating complex behaviours. Not understanding students with challenging behaviours can result in a failure to thrive at school even though they are in a fully inclusive school environment. These are the students who cannot attend school safely and are on reduced days and/or spend hours per day out of the classroom.

Challenging behaviours in students require the observer to consider a variety of potential influences on the child which may impact behaviour. In a school environment, there are expected developmental milestones and outcomes according to grade. Not meeting academic and social/emotional milestones invites investigations into potential barriers. The school leader's role is to look at current practices and how students are being served, identifying what is not working and asking the question, why are they not succeeding? Moreover, what should be done differently? Greene and Ablon (2006) question the "educational policies that continue to apply consequences to students whose behavioural difficulties are not durably affected by

consequences” (p. 177) and believe this to be “the epitome of inefficiency, wasted effort and futility” (p. 177).

It is critical to understand the stakeholders’ reactions to change; identifying and responding to legitimate stakeholders’ concerns would benefit the change process. The stakeholders are teachers, staff and parents. Duignan (2006) suggests that leaders “need to be sensitive to the fears and anxieties of those involved in a change process” (p. 31). Change plan considerations cannot occur without communication and need to be upfront and ongoing.

Cawsey et al. (2016) share “that good communication is essential to minimize the effects of rumours, to mobilize support for the change, and to sustain enthusiasm and commitment” (p. 320). Cawsey et al. (2016) believe that the communication plans for change should center on four primary goals:

1. To infuse the need for change through the organization.
2. To enable individuals to understand the impact that the change will have on them.
3. To communicate any structural and job changes that will influence how things are done.
4. To keep people informed about progress along the way.
5. As the change unfolds, the focus of the communication plan shifts. (p. 320)

Having a positive approach is also going to gain leverage when beginning the change process. As an implementor of change, Lewis (2019) shares “that if the change leader assume[s] resistance in stakeholders, you may prompt that response” (p. 149). Therefore, within the change plan, while expecting some resistance, the change leader needs to be open to stakeholder feedback and use this as an opportunity to adjust the plan. Stakeholders questioning the change and asking for the framework of change may help find success within the change process.

Hultman (1979), as cited in Mento, Jones, and Dirndorfer (2002), explains that:

Without resistance to change, we are skeptical of real change occurring. Without real questioning, skepticism, and even outright resistance, it is unlikely that the organization will successfully move on to the productive stage of learning how to make the new structure effective and useful (p. 53).

Knowing staff and the dedication to their profession and students, resistance will be proactive and with a positive stance.

### **Change Drivers**

Access to funding and time to implement professional learning can be challenging in a school environment. Past professional learning opportunities have allowed access to funds and release time for supply teachers and resources to guide the learning. However, current access to funding for these professional learning opportunities and purchasing resources is limited, with no clear messaging of future access. An additional barrier to funding access is having it earmarked for a specific academic focus versus a social/emotional focus.

Access to board Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) members to assist staff in promoting a preventative and strength-based approach in their work with students is a critical need to move forward with the plan. Autism Canada (2020) describes Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) as “the process of systematically applying interventions, based upon the principles of learning theory, to improve socially significant behaviours to a meaningful degree” (autismcanada.org., para.1). The Board ABA lead guides the process of collecting Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence (ABC) data on students who struggle with self-regulation and behaviour issues, guiding the planning of the next steps.

**Organizational Change Readiness**

Building capacity through staff professional learning to understand the necessity of getting to know and positively support students and families is the goal. Fullan and Quinn (2016) refer to “capacity building as the skills, competencies, and knowledge that individuals and groups need in order to be effective at accomplishing the goals at hand” (p. 6). Change in how students are served in schools is necessary as some students are unable to remain in school all day safely. Students who demonstrate that they are unable to be in the classroom are excused or removed which further marginalizes them. Collaborative skill-building using a whole school approach will build a sense of cohesion for staff. According to Fullan and Quinn (2016) this is because “knowledge and skills are being developed, the collaborative culture is deepened, shared meaning is clarified, and commitment is reinforced” (p. 56).

The question is, are staff ready for this change? The number of students who are not thriving in St. David’s inclusive school environment indicates that some type of change in practice is necessary.

The Organizational Readiness for Change tool (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 110), is used to indicate the readiness for change. St. David’s Readiness for Change score result findings were +27 (see Table #1). The score range indicated by Cawsey et al. (2016) is -10 to +35, with a higher score indicating change readiness. The score of +27 indicates our organization is ready for change and more likely to succeed as some of the Readiness Dimensions are in place.



**Table 1**

*Organizational Change Readiness. Adapted from Rate the Organization's Readiness for Change by Cawsey et al. 2016.*

Readiness Dimensions	Readiness Score
Previous Change Experiences	-4
Executive Support	4
Credible Leadership and Change Champions	9
Openness to Change	9
Readiness Dimensions	4
Rewards for Change	1
Measures for Change and Accountability	4
Total	+27

Each question response is given a value from -1 to +2. The scores can range from -10 to +35. If the organization scores below 10, it is not likely ready for a change, or the process will be challenging. The higher the score indicates change readiness. Table 1 outlines the seven Readiness Dimensions and the total readiness scores for each to determine the change readiness at St. David's school. The readiness score for St. David's school was +27. This score indicates that St. David's is well situated to support a change, however, there are some areas with lower scores which would need to be addressed. The Executive Support dimension asks about a clear picture of the future, and that is an area that could be more fully explained to staff.

Beckhard and Harris (1987) state that "addressing the why change? question is necessary and a precondition to being able to define the desired future state or vision" (p.105). They share that "if the why change question is never meaningfully addressed, no one should then expect any sense of a shared vision" (Beckhard and Harris, 1987, p. 105). There are challenges within the

change process and in the school to promote change and meet the goal of decreasing students' challenging behaviours. Following Cawsey's et al's (2016) Change Path model framework will provoke the change to develop teacher practice and more robust strategies to guide the ongoing work with students experiencing behaviour challenges. These strategies will collectively look at current practices, identify deficits and propose the direction of improved practice with the goal of greater student success. This framework will be discussed more depth in Chapter 2. Change readiness appears to be in place for the organization. Building capacity to serve students more fully and being trauma-informed will be a process that will develop professional knowledge and result in a more positive teaching/learning environment.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Planning and Development**

This chapter discusses the leadership framework and approaches used to drive the change plan forward. The questions of how and what to change are addressed within this chapter. As well as possible solutions to address the Problem of Practice of better serving students with challenging behaviours who are not thriving in a fully inclusive school. Finally, ethical challenges are considered throughout the stages of the change process within this chapter.

#### **Leadership Approaches to Change**

Northouse (2016) suggests that leadership is a complex process with multiple dimensions to be considered. More specifically, he suggests that “leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 6). When looking to influence an organization’s members, one needs to assess the environment, the people, and the specific needs within the environment before beginning a change plan. Building authentic relationships with a shared and ethical focus is a favoured approach for the Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) for St. David’s School. The importance of positive relationships in order to influence learning and bring about an important change in the school “cannot be over emphasized” (Katz et al., 2018, p. 44). Authentic leadership can be transformational.

Duignan (2006) states that “the work of authentic educational leaders is transformational as they promote and support transformational teaching and learning” (p.131). He asserts that “authentic transformational leaders must bring their deepest principles, beliefs, values and convictions to their work” (p. 131). Staff members at St. David’s demonstrate a deep conviction and dedication to their students and a very collaborative openness to learning. These qualities will help facilitate the implementation of the change process as it is anticipated that staff will

respond to authentic and transformational leadership. The positive relationships between myself as the administrator, and staff, have created a receptive environment for implementation and staff growth. The willingness of key staff to co-lead comes from having developed a high level of trust.

Developing a focused direction of change needs to be intentionally driven in multiple ways by change leaders. Fullan and Quinn (2016) suggest that leaders must understand their own moral purpose and be able to merge their personal values, persistence, and resilience. More precisely, they suggest that “leaders need the ability to develop a shared moral purpose and meaning as well as a pathway for attaining purpose” (p. 17). The moral imperative aligns with the authentic and transformational leadership approach used in the Organizational Improvement Plan for St. David’s school.

Fullan and Quinn (2016) suggest that developing moral imperative in others can be prompted by doing the following: “Build relationships with everyone, including those who disagree, are skeptical, or even cynical; listen and understand the perspective of others; demonstrate respect for all; create conditions to connect others around that purpose and examine with staff evidence of progress” (p. 19).

Critical components are in place that are necessary to support the journey of organizational improvement plan. Staff and administration have good relationships, which will support capacity building. Interactions are respectful and built on regular dialogue where feedback is elicited and acted upon when suitable. There is a high value placed on professionalism and commitment to job responsibility and expectations, which will aid in learning together and being purposeful and meaningful. Exposure to specific resources will help staff move towards developing skills to be more trauma-informed and to approach students with

a more proactive and asset focused plan. The current status of students with behavioural needs which results in them being taken out of class or put on reduced days is not favoured by staff. Staff consistently engage in conversation and share their hope for this to end, indicating they are ready for a different response to what is becoming a norm in the school.

This staff learning journey is one where all, including the principal, will be collectively involved, making the plan authentic. Principal participation as a learner with staff is found to be twice as significant to help move the school forward (Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008 in Fullan & Quinn, 2016). The team will be engaging in a collaborative approach to build capacity in the learning journey.

Flexibility and adaptability within a change plan are considered important in the literature. Being open to a common goal and exercising flexibility with the people in the organization must be considered. Flexible and adaptable leadership approaches involve changing behaviours in appropriate ways as the situation changes (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). The need to be flexible and for leaders to adapt their behaviour is considered important so planning will suit the situation and meet immediate needs.

The adaptive and flexible leader can quickly and adeptly respond to a sudden event that disrupts the environment's routine. Yukl and Mahsud (2010) believe that how well the leader responds to these adverse interruptions is indicative of strong, adaptive and flexible leadership and that different tasks usually require a different pattern of leadership behaviour. A consistent and standard approach at St. David's school versus responding to situational changes in an adaptive approach will better serve students with behavioural challenges. Building relationships is a critical element within the change process. Relationship building with students and families

requires consistency, time and ongoing interactions making the transformational and authentic approach the most effective approaches to meet the suggested change goals.

Examining the problem of practice (PoP) through an authentic and transformational lens will better serve students with challenging behaviours who are not thriving in the inclusive school environment. This problem has many very sensitive tenets that need to be approached mindfully with ethical awareness, care and understanding. Young students, their parents and teaching professionals are all involved, and all have different and unique needs. Many leadership approaches would support the PoP however, based on the well-established culture, climate and relationships already embedded in the environment, the authentic and transformative approach will have the most traction to move change forward.

Building strong relationships support trust-building which is a vital leadership practice that helps to build the responsive capacity of staff. Katz et al. (2018) state this capacity is “required to meet challenging goals.....and if capacity is not built in the staff, then the chances of making progress in set directions decrease” (p. 44).

Identifying authentic and transformational leadership approaches as the leader within the organization is a crucial step to attain the change goals.

### **Considering an Alternate Framework**

A school administrator in the province of Ontario with its highly successful and valued educational system needs to know how to make effective change. The province is noted as a centre of excellence, goals are set high, and leadership is a foundational piece needed for enhancing system-wide improvement (Ontario Leadership Framework, 2013). I have identified my leadership strengths, and they align well with the authentic and transformational approaches.

The strengths found within the two approaches include honesty, genuineness, shared followership (Burns, 1978), and a strong sense of moral purpose.

The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) was designed to support and sustain high-quality leadership in districts and schools across Ontario. For those in leadership, it is a valuable self-assessment tool to guide one's practice. It is a framework used as a guide for leaders in daily practice and when promoting a change plan. Competent leaders need to have effective leadership skills, and the OLF offers many key concepts believed to be necessary for leaders to succeed. The OLF only identifies with those leadership traits considered to be valued based on "compelling research" (Ontario Leadership Framework, 2013, p.6).

The OLF offers a list of Personal Leadership Resources, which include cognitive, social and psychological resources. Within the three areas the list contains some expected leadership qualities: optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, proactivity and problem-solving. However, there is a negative tone that accompanies the identified traits which goes against the authentic and transformational leadership approaches present in the OIP. When addressing students and their families at St. David's, the expectation is to be fully inclusive, but the language used within the OLF such as exercise control, consequences, technical and family conditions, and managing emotions is at times not inclusive. This OIP asks for staff to increase their knowledge, become more aware of students' needs, how trauma has affected them, and to not judge families, but embrace them. The OIP encourages staff to adopt a socially just lens and adhere to the mission statement of teaching the whole child, being inclusive and working collectively to serve all students but particularly those not thriving at St. David's school.

**Strengths and Limitations of Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is grounded in a moral foundation based on a mutual relationship between leaders and followers. It invites people to redefine their vision and mission and restructure their systems for goal accomplishments (Leithwood, as cited in Cashin et al., 2000). At St. David's, the staff will be asked to look closely at the PoP with the administrator and recognize that while there are many ongoing conversations and meetings about students with challenging behaviours, the problem remains, and our students are not all thriving. The behaviour continues, and we manage students, but we do not see them thrive, which is the goal of the OIP. In previous work done at St. David's school, the staff have demonstrated that the moral foundations are in place. This is a strength of staff members and the base to work forward from as the OIP begins.

Transformational leaders offer a clear view of the future and a chance for followers to see meaning in their work and challenge them with high standards (Hay, 2006). Honestly promoting an improved future to staff and the hope for a successful result is necessary; however, this presents a challenge within the OIP. Many staff members at St. David's have been supporting students with behavioural needs for many years, and they have experienced previous attempts to help these students through new initiatives. Some positive outcomes have come from these initiatives for some students, yet students still struggle to fully engage in the typical school day. There may be staff members who will approach the OIP with some resistance and fatigue, believing that they have already attempted to make the change, but it just didn't work. The response to potential resistance will be met with honesty and guidance to alter thinking patterns of staff and the learning focuses on the effects of trauma.



There are certain concerns within the transformational leadership approach because there is a reliance on an emotional appeal to overcome a potential problem. This demands the need to be aware of the effects by always being respectful and transparent. There is a need to be self-reflective with a moral lens on how the work will impact on others.

The OIP is focused on students and improving their behaviours and offering them what both staff, parents and students want; to have successful experiences at school. The OIP is transparent and developed through a morally driven and socially just lens; there is no power to be gained for the change leader. These criticisms about the morality of transformational leadership have been addressed by the argument that to be genuinely transformational, leadership must have moral foundations (Griffin, 2003). Change plans using an authentic and transformational leadership approach should demonstrate strong ethical values within it. The proposals should include values that demonstrate honesty, fairness, justice and equality.

### **Strengths and Limitations of Authentic Leadership**

Authentic leadership suggests a pattern of behaviours that promotes positive psychological competencies and a positive ethical climate in the workplace (Walumbwa et al., 2008). The positive skills within authentic leadership align with the OIP goals. Becoming a trauma-informed school promotes the psychological well-being of staff, students and families. Together with staff and students building resiliency, an inclusive and safe learning environment will encourage a sense of well-being for all. The authentic leader encourages co-workers to become leaders themselves and to be confident, resilient, optimistic and to have an ethical/moral lens in their work (Luthans, 2011).

The proposed change plan for St. David's staff offers opportunities for them to become trauma-informed experts and develop the characteristics of optimism and confidence. The

proposed resources within the OIP will build new skills and also allow staff the opportunity to develop their well-being through mental health awareness and trauma-informed learning opportunities. This learning will build confidence in their practice and encourage the belief that with our help, all students can thrive at St. David's school. The authentic leadership concept has the essence of the positive features of humanity, such as positive emotions, self-confidence, hope and goal-achievement for subjective happiness psychological well-being (Joo & Nimon, 2014). The authentic learning within the OIP gives staff the tools to support students and their families but also encourages personal development to support their own psychological well being.

Similar to the transformational approach, the limitations of the authentic leadership approach include a moral/ethical perspective. To what degree does the leader set a high standard for moral and ethical conduct? How does one measure what is a high moral standard? The moral and ethical beliefs of the leader need to be genuine and routinely witnessed by the followers for a truly authentic leader to inspire real followership. Both authentic and transformational leadership approaches reflect emotional reactions by followers to leaders (Yukl, 2010). This indicates that there could be some resistance to the OIP by staff members that do not hold the administrator in high regard.

Joo and Nimon (2014) examined the relationship between transformational leadership and authentic leadership using canonical correlation analysis. They found that "from the perception of subordinates, an authentic leader appears to be a transformational leader or vice versa" (p. 582). Transformational and authentic leadership share more similarities than differences between the two supportive leadership behaviours. However, the two leadership behaviours are not substitutable but complementary (Joo & Nimon, 2014). Selecting both as

approaches for the OIP was necessary as the components from both suited the change leader and staff already strong relationships, reciprocal learning stance and shared genuine care for students.

Gravett (2004) states that “the transformative approach to making change asks us to look at our own assumptions and alternative views and consider replacing old perspectives in favour of new ones, which will result in a more justified belief to guide actions” (p.1). Building capacity with staff to develop a new understanding or an updated understanding of how to approach all students with a strength/asset-based approach and being trauma-aware is the goal. Some of this learning will be entirely new for staff; for others, it may be an update. A change process will involve professional learning to enhance teaching practice and promote a decrease in student behaviours. Working within a collaborative environment such as St. David’s School invites the opportunity to build on existing relationships. Carter, Armenakis, Field and Mossholder, (2013) state that “transformational leaders can act as a change antecedent who facilitates the development of quality relationships between leaders and their employees” (p. 943). The current relationships are well situated at St. David’s and are likely to become stronger through the change process as the team works together. There is a sense of trust developed through interactions that have been reciprocal, transparent and authentic. This is based on an understanding of working for the common good, in this instance, for the students to decrease challenging behaviours.

Within the OIP, when the focal point of the PoP involves students, parents and teachers, this calls one to lead with a very moral and transparent focus. Considering that the students and families identify as having experienced trauma and often have one or more ACE factors present, it makes a change plan and everything within it very sensitive. Northouse (2016) defines “authentic leadership as one that is transparent, morally grounded and responsive to people’s

needs and values” (p. 220). For this reason, the authentic approach is a useful model for change for this OIP.

### **Framework for Leading Change Process**

Planning a change process begins with change leaders identifying gaps or a problem and then planning a process that will, in some way, alter actions that will result in a more preferred outcome. Many factors impact a change process as there are many stakeholders and outside expectations that can affect the implementation process. Change is sometimes necessary to correct past failures and accomplish new learning. However, the organizational members collectively agreeing with the change leader on the plan for change can be a challenge. Lewis (2019) states that “decision-makers often agree on problems to be solved, the principles in solving them and even the changes to be made; the actual implementation of ideas and improvement can be extremely challenging” (p. 2).

Change initiatives within the educational system are not new. However, the embedded long-lasting impact of change processes continue to be a struggle. According to Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan, (1996), “educators appear to know how to create islands of change but not how to construct archipelagoes or build entire continents of them” (p. 36). Although one may identify a need for change and look to respond to needs identified within organizations, according to Higgs & Rowland (2005), “it is asserted that up to 70% of change initiatives fail” (p. 121). This promotes the need for change leaders to select a change plan that is best suited to their context.

**Change Path Framework.** Cawsey et al’s (2016) Change Path model framework will guide the change process work to develop teacher practice and strategies to decrease the number of students experiencing behaviour challenges. The change leader will look at current practices

and identify deficits and use the framework to guide the process of the proposed improved practice leading to greater student success.

Cawsey et al's (2016) four-step framework will support the OIP process as follows:

***Awakening.*** The need for change is identified and determined in understandable terms. A discussion with staff regarding obligations to students with behaviour needs will occur in this first stage. The change leader will explain the need for specific teacher professional learning to occur better to serve the needs of students with behavioural challenges. This is what Katz, Dack and Malloy (2018) refer to as “setting direction” (p.41), where through a collaborative process a focused commitment is arrived at, these commitments are effectively communicated, and there is a shared understanding across the school. Katz et al. (2018) share that staff are motivated because “what they are being asked to do is compelling and all staff are invited to take responsibility for monitoring the progress of the goals” (p. 42).

***Mobilization.*** The span between the current state and desired state is identified. Understanding the implications of the current situation in having our students out of the classroom and on shortened days/alternative schedules and not thriving in the school. The goal is for students to remain in the classroom, self-regulate and fully engage in the school environment. This is a crucial stage in the OIP as there are support staff not involved in team meetings and may not realize the complexities of the current state. Prior work with staff regarding students with behaviours was focused on how to best retain student's dignity, with the expectation to not engage in sidebar conversations or negative conversations about students with challenging needs. To build whole school capacity it is important for staff not directly involved to become more closely informed about the reality of student's needs. Building an awareness of the need to look at a culture change and our roles and responsibilities in making a change for these students.

***Acceleration.*** The process plan will bridge the gap through action planning and the final implementation. Focused learning using intentional resources, exposure to mental health guides and the board's mental health lead will help develop the school teams' skills on how to better serve these students. Appealing for increased ABA support from the board to provide in-service training will also support the work within the plan. Staff must consider the student first, to learn to be responsible and proactive for their interactions with students and to understand the impact that has on them, especially those with challenging behaviours. Building momentum in this stage is imperative and stakeholder participation and input on the change plan is required, and according to Lewis (2019), "will increase chances of success by lowering resistance, increasing their satisfaction, increase feelings of control and reduce uncertainty about the change" (p.164).

***Institutionalization.*** In this final stage of the plan the change leader tracks the changes to assess what is needed, gauging the process towards the goal and altering as required. The focus is to incorporate the learned trauma-sensitive strategies and build resilient learners, with the intent to decrease negative student behaviours. There will be variations of implementation as many teachers will enter this learning and change process with different background experiences and knowledge of being trauma-informed. The expectation is to be a trauma-aware staff and use an asset-based approach with students and families. Success will be realized when we will be able to track a decrease in challenging student behaviours.

This framework aligns with the plan to transform the staff interactions with students through strategic and purposeful learning to improve practice. Change readiness appears to be in place for the organization indicating an increased opportunity for success. Building capacity within the building to serve students through a trauma-informed lens will be a process that will

develop professional knowledge and result in a more positive teaching/learning environment where all students can thrive.

### **Critical Organizational Analysis**

Within the leader or manager role, it is essential to promote a transparent and well-communicated plan for change. Ambiguity in a change plan can confuse, and according to Kierser et al. (2003), “organizational members are not able to make sense of the environment or to explain why certain changes have happened at all” (as cited in Godkin, 2010, p. 197).

Awareness of the capacity of the organizational members to embrace change is essential. There are factors to consider when building capacity, which raises critical questions such as are there staff who will be resistant to change? Will staff remain stuck in their current structure, or will they be able to embrace the shared knowledge for a change plan? Brown and Duguid (1998 as cited in Godkin, 2010, p. 296) believe that sometimes “even when knowledge is available to organizational members, there can be apathy toward change and members remain embedded in their social structure”.

Despite the possibility of apathy or barriers with staff regarding change implementations, entering into the OIP with solid plans and engaged staff promote the likelihood of success. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Rate the Organization’s Readiness for Change by (Cawsey et al. 2016) is a questionnaire that provides change leaders with an indicator of the organization’s readiness for change. The completed questionnaire resulted in a high score (+27) which indicates likely success for a change plan to succeed at St. David’s school.

The staff at St. David’s school have shared concerns and a sense of frustration with the current status of students demonstrating unregulated behaviours. These feelings indicate it is an optimal time to develop and implement a change plan with staff. St. David’s staff are a cohesive

group who have experienced some consistent changes in leadership in the last few years yet have bounced back each time with relationships intact and an ongoing eagerness to teach and support students. These factors, as well as their feelings of concern and frustration, indicate readiness for change. Cawsey et al. (2016) state that “being dissatisfied with the status quo helps to ready the organization for change” (p. 106). There are staff members who will be less enthusiastic; however, the group collective has indicated an uneasiness with the current situation of students demonstrating challenging behaviours, which may promote increased engagement.

A study conducted by Holt et al. (2007) suggests that readiness for change is a multidimensional construct influenced by beliefs among employees:

1. They are capable of implementing a proposed change (i.e., change-specific efficacy);
2. The proposed change is appropriate for the organization (i.e., appropriateness);
3. The leaders are committed to the proposed change (i.e., management support);
4. The proposed change is beneficial to organizational members (i.e., personal valence).

(p.232)

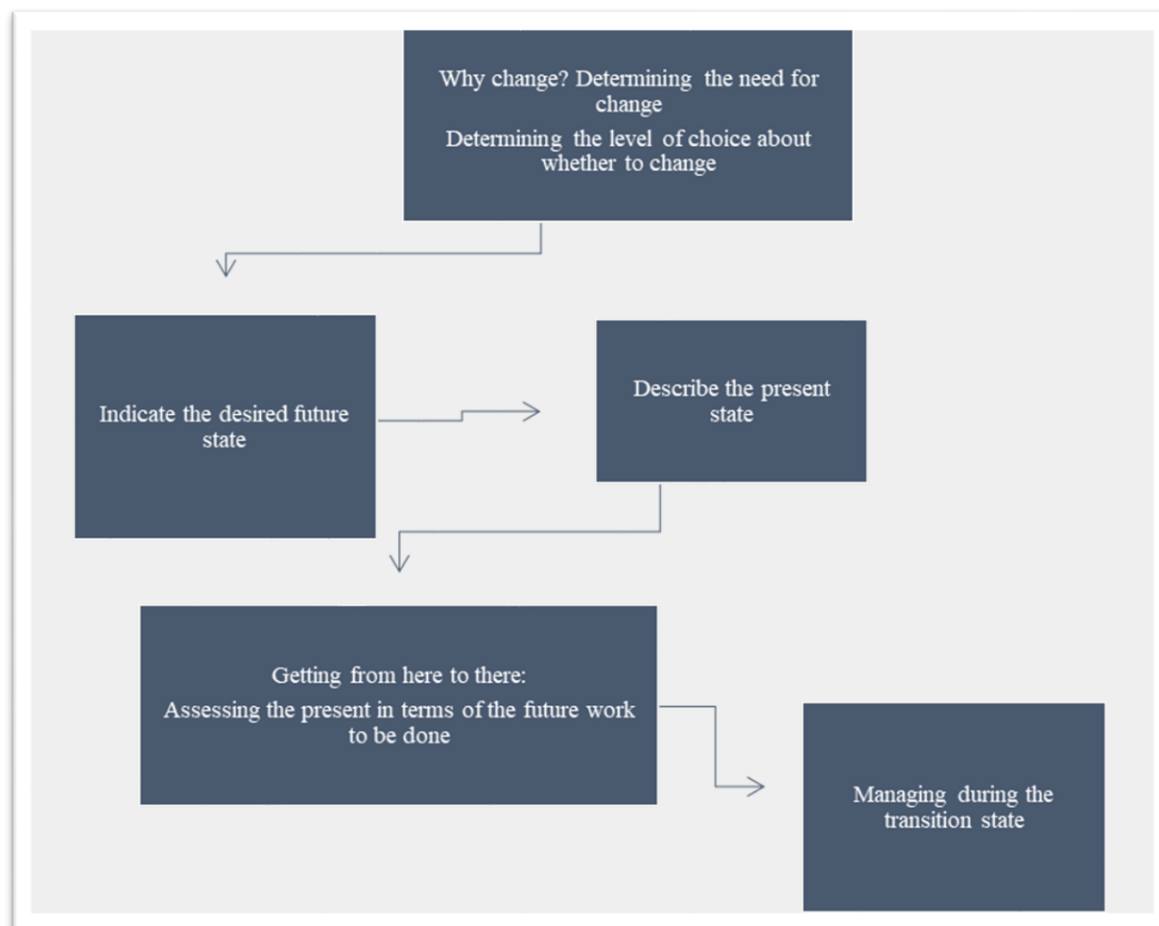
The proposed change goals are reasonable and recognized by the majority of staff as a necessary move. It is a very manageable and low risk proposed change, additional professional learning for staff is within their realm of capability.

The change goals will be communicated to parents as they are stakeholders in the process. The goals will initially be communicated to the Catholic School Advisory Council and as the process progresses with the staff, parents will then begin to see more communication from and within the school during the move towards developing a trauma-informed culture.

Determining the difference between where the organization is currently and where they want to be will determine the organization’s change plan. Beckhard and Harris (2016) refer to



this as gap analysis, as demonstrated in Figure 1. The leader determines the need for change, develops a vision for change, and how that gap between present and future goals is going to be closed. The high number of students consistently out of classrooms and on reduced days has determined that there is a need for change. The future work consists of staff engaging with professional learning to become trauma-sensitive and more reflective during their exchanges with students in the hopes of reducing outbursts.



*Figure 1. Developing a vision for change. Adapted from Change Management Process by Beckhard & Harris, 2016. J.Ritsma (2020)*

At St. David's, the current state is one where some students are struggling to regulate their behaviours, which can sometimes result in demonstrations of extreme outbursts that can

damage both people and property. These disruptions block access to both curricula learning as well as social development with peers. They have also become habitual for some students and staff as patterns of behaviour and responses have become routine.

For this OIP, the desired future state is to have students regulate their behaviours, remain in the classrooms, attend school full time, make academic gains, and social and emotional development through relationship-building with peers and staff. For this to occur, the status quo needs to be altered. Through the execution of a supported change process, new understanding and practices need to be shared and embedded to improve exchanges between staff and students. Staff skills and competencies to be developed include:

- The staff's ability to be aware of how trauma-affected students may respond to requests and routines within the regular school day as described within the Sanctuary Change Model
- The development of more proactive and regulated adult responses to students that respond in interfering ways to routine requests
- The ability to collaborate with both board staff ABA/mental health leads and parents to take away practices and strategies to support learning and improve student/teacher interactions resulting in few outbursts.

In summary, there are currently some gaps in understanding for staff in how they engage and embrace students with challenging behaviours. The change process work will address this gap.

### **Possible Solutions to Address the Problem of Practice**

Three possible solutions to address the problem of practice will be shared. These include improving teacher practice, increasing access to the Board ABA/Mental Health leads and

increased parent involvement and awareness. These solutions will be presented to staff using the tenets from both transformational and authentic leadership approaches.

Leadership is a complex process that is challenging to define. Asking one to explain the role of a leader can result in very diverse responses. There are many leadership approaches and many factors that can affect a leader when they hope to make a change within an organization. Identifying your leadership approach is a crucial step when planning a change process within an organization. Determining your strengths and weaknesses as a potential implementor of change is a critical factor before beginning the change process. As well as deciding your change drivers that will affect the success of the change outcome, will they support the process or present barriers?

After consideration of all three solutions, my plan is to combine them as there is merit within all that will support the change plan.

**Specific Professional Learning.** The first possible solution is looking at improving teacher practice through professional learning opportunities. Professional learning provides an opportunity for staff to become trauma-informed and engage with students using an asset-strength based approach. Relationship building with families has allowed the administrator and staff to identify that many students with behavioural challenges are coming to school with some history of trauma. The impact of those experiences appears to affect their response to routine expectations, resulting in flight or fight behaviours. Post-traumatic responses vary in children, and according to Perry (2003), “there are multiple sets of neurobiological and mental responses to stress” (p.12). Perry (2003) suggests that:

These vary with the nature, intensity and frequency of the event. Different children may have unique and individualized ‘response’ sets to the same trauma. Two primary

adaptive response patterns in the face of extreme threat are the hyperarousal continuum (defense -- fight or flight) and the dissociation continuum (freeze and surrender response). Each of these response ‘sets’ activates a unique combination of neural ‘systems’ (p.12).

Professional learning for staff on becoming more trauma-sensitive is needed, as they are serving students each day that are not thriving due to its effects. Ko et al. (2008) state that “teachers, school psychologists, counselors, and school social workers typically receive little formal training or continuing education about the impact of trauma on students and ways they can help traumatized students achieve better educational outcomes” (p. 398).

The learning for staff will focus on how to be more proactive and sensitive to all students’ needs, particularly those that demonstrate behaviours interfering with learning and socializing. Previous experiences with the teachers at St. David’s indicate an openness to improving practices with a focus on student success through ongoing professional learning. According to Guskey (2002), “what attracts teachers to professional development, therefore, is their belief that it will expand their knowledge and skills, contribute to their growth, and enhance their effectiveness with students” (p.382). Staff members at St. David’s are motivated and professional and generally open to learning and improving their practice. The difficulties observed in students with behavioural challenges are drawn into many staff conversations. These difficulties indicate that those students are not well served, and a change needs to occur. Harootunian and Yargar (1980) (as cited in Gusky, 1986), found that “regardless of teaching level, most teachers define their success in terms of their pupils’ behaviors and activities, rather than in terms of themselves or other criteria” (p. 6). A growing number of conversations with staff about their students surface feelings of inadequacy and a sense of failure. Teachers are

recognizing that their skillset is not meeting the needs of the students that have great difficulty interacting at school in a safe way.

The ON Ministry of Education's Growing Success document (2010) indicates the need for teachers "to create environments in which all students feel valued and confident and have the courage to take risks and make mistakes" (p.8). Creating learning environments that suit the needs of all students, all the time, is challenging. Providing a unique environment for students with behaviour challenges is particularly tricky when teachers are not trained to know how to do this. However, the Growing Success document states that it is necessary within "their important professional role, that teachers show students that they care about them, and model a love of learning that can deeply influence their lives" (p. 8). St. David's staff are at an advantage in this area as they do care about their students and want them to succeed.

The staff understands the importance of their students needing to have strong learning skills; they hold them in high regard. Many discussions with staff occur when preparing report cards for the students with behaviour needs. Learning skills on the report card include responsibility, organization, independent work, initiative, collaboration and self-regulation. Staff recognize that these students are unable to find success in many of these areas, but they struggle to understand why and how to help them. The staff continually look for opportunities to build these skills with students who do not successfully demonstrate them. Many in-school adult-led clubs and activities have been designed to build social/emotional experiences with students to assist in developing skills in these areas. This willingness to serve students speaks to the commitment and dedication that would support the plan change moving forward. Staff are not all at the same stage in their understanding regarding how they may trigger behaviours; determining this will be beneficial in the planning stage.

Mental models, a component within Senge's (2006) Theory of Learning Organizations (see Figure. 2), are the beliefs and assumptions held by individuals about events and concepts that impact behaviour.



*Figure 2.* Mental models within the learning organization. Adapted from Senge's Theory of Learning Model, 2006, p.189. J. Ritsma, 2020.

Determining staff mental models will be a necessary beginning point as this will ensure that professional learning is focused and meaningful, without assumptions.

Senge (2006) shares the value of uncovering mental models:

If managers “believe” their world views are facts rather than sets of assumptions, they will not be open to challenging those world views. If they lack the skills in inquiring into their and others’ ways of thinking, they will be limited in experimenting collaboratively with new ways of things... if there is no established philosophy and understanding of mental models in the organization, people will misperceive the purpose of systems thinking (p.189).

Senge's research reinforces the change leader's belief that there is a need for staff professional development and capacity building to alter the culture of responsibility and better understand students with behavioural needs.

A series of open questions will be posted on the Thought Exchange crowdsourcing platform to determine mental models. This platform allows for real-time responses by participants and ratings of responses by the respondents. The data collection will identify any common themes of mental models that may be present and will inform the planning and next steps for individuals.

**Parent Engagement.** Parents play an essential role in their child's school life, and to see the benefits that parent involvement can offer, they need to be involved. This includes staff being well connected and collaborating with the parents of students and providing support when it is required. According to Pushor (2011), "school staff engagement with families depends on a sense of reciprocity and deep feelings of mutual care, respect, and commitment" (p.68). This engaging connection can solidify the belief that a common goal of care and support for the children involved is achievable and viewed as a team of support. The Australian Family-School Partnerships Framework (2008) defines these partnerships as:

collaborative relationships and activities involving school staff, parents and other family members of students at a school. Effective partnerships are based on mutual trust and respect and shared responsibility for the education of the children and young people at the school (p. 2).

They indicate that a strong relationship with parents can support a change plan to promote improved student behaviours. According to the Ministry of Education (2011) Parent Engagement, "students are more likely to be motivated, to earn higher grades, to have better

behaviour and social skills, and to continue their education to a higher level when their parents are actively engaged in supporting their success at school” (MOE, Parent Engagement, para.2). Engaged parents are especially critical when working with students that are struggling with interfering behaviours. Through interactions with parents of students demonstrating extreme behaviours or violence, staff have learned that most often, these behaviours are not unique to the school environment but are present in the home as well. The work begins in building a relationship with families and collaboratively planning support for both the student and the family. When developing a trauma-sensitive culture in the school, a respectful understanding of what may be impacting the students at home can benefit the process. Depending on the circumstances, some parents may not be well connected or aware of the support available. Being open and honest with families and sending the message of a collaborative team working together to help their child find greater success may build trust. According to Bryk and Schneider (2003), “relational trust is the connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance the education and welfare of students” (p. 45). This trusting relationship will provide an opportunity for dialogue and information sharing to offer insight into why some behaviours might be occurring. Some questions to consider include, is the family struggling with poverty? Are they providing the necessities that provide a healthy home environment for their child? Is the child accessing any medical attention? Should they be?

To access mental health support and resources at the school, the administrator completes a referral application for the Mental Health Lead. This lead person determines the need and, if the application is approved, the in-school counsellor will proceed. The referral process requires parental consent, and this counselling support is also available for parents. More recently, due to some parents missing or forgetting counselling sessions that are off of the school-site, St.



David's is providing a space for the counsellor to meet with referred parents at the school. For some parents, the school environment is becoming a safe space. If the school staff are building relationships with parents and gaining trust with them, parents may more readily accept the invitation to participate with their child and engage in their sessions. Positive and less formal opportunities for parents and staff to engage are when relationships are built. Occasions such as open houses, school-wide BBQs and supervising class trips allow for staff and parents to celebrate the students and the school community in a relaxed manner. Allowing for connections that are outside of the academic and behavioural expectations, where more informal conversations occur and trust and relationships can be built. Building social trust among teachers, parents, and school leaders improve the routine work and necessary expectations within the school and is a "key resource for reform" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p.40).

When parents and staff build relationships that are collaborative, meaningful and honest, parents begin to recognize the school as a safe and trusted place for both their child and themselves to receive support. In a collaborative relationship, parents and teachers share in a joint responsibility of care and support of the child. Vosler-Hunter (1989), as cited in Adams and Christenson (1998) state some critical elements of collaboration:

- honest and clear communication open and two-way sharing of information
- mutually agreed upon goals
- mutual respect for skills and knowledge
- shared planning and decision making (p. 478).

Building connections with parents and developing a healthy, supportive relationship with them and their children promotes a sense of trust and a common goal of student success. Souers and Hall (2019) state that:

We often underestimate the power of connection and the value it can add to education.

Providing connection and safety does not require us to become best friends with our students or minimize academics; it requires us to commit to provide a healthy, supportive environment where students feel cared about and empowered to learn (p. 77).

When trust is built through relationship building with families, this opens the potential for the net of support for parents to widen as the administrator and staff can introduce support opportunities through local social services. At St. David's school, it has been observed that some parents who initially resisted referrals for counselling services or other available supports, changed their minds when they became more open to conversations and comfortable with a staff member or the administrator.

**Increased Human Resources/Build Collective Efficacy.** The third solution includes a plan for increased human resources from the board, primarily additional Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) /mental health learning and support with strategies that may assist in mitigating challenging behaviours. Limited support is a challenge as St. David's is a part of a small board that only has three ABA leads and one mental health lead for the fifteen elementary and two secondary schools. Accessing ABA and mental health support will offer another angle of professional learning for staff. Board office staff will lead the learning and model best practices for the school staff and build their repertoire of strategies to inform practice and support students with behavioural challenges. This new learning will build a sense of collective efficacy among teachers as they learn together through the direction of board experts. These enhanced practices will have a more profound impact as the staff will begin to learn from one another as the momentum grows. This collective learning may result in the strategies becoming more deeply embedded even once the experts leave. According to Donohoo, Hattie and Eells (2018):

When educators share a sense of collective efficacy, school cultures tend to be characterized by beliefs that reflect high expectations for student success and a shared language that represents a focus on student learning as opposed to instructional compliance often emerges (p. 41).

St. David's staff are collaborative and open to many learning opportunities; this added knowledge will enhance the skill set of staff and support opportunities for student success.

Collecting Antecedent Behaviour Consequence (ABC) data on unregulated students is the first step in planning for students with interfering behaviours. Accurate data collection of student behaviours allows the ABA leads to determine triggers and patterns in what may be influencing maladaptive behaviours. Data collection and analysis by the ABA leads and staff allow them to make evidence-informed decisions on the appropriate strategies or necessary interventions to help the student. The school team looks to the ABA leads' observations in conjunction with the Mental Health lead to guide the process of learning and implement best practices to engage with students that demonstrate unregulated behaviours successfully.

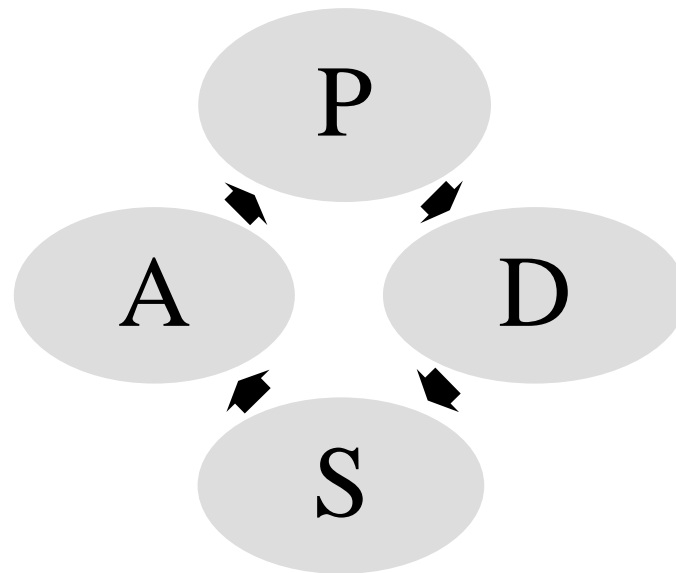
The solutions offered are not ones that will be independently applied and will most likely all have equal positive benefits. Using the three solutions in a coordinated manner will be the goal. There is no quick fix approach, and all solutions have merit and will serve all students in the school, not just specific students, which offers a universal benefit for all.

The suggested solutions take time to implement and involve the learning of new information and time to become embedded. The first solution to provide professional learning for staff to become trauma-informed using a strength-based approach is critical. The second solution involves staff building trust and relationships with parents using the SMH- ASSIST resource, special evening events and increased face to face opportunities in the school environment. The

third solution the school has less control over, accessing the ABA and Mental Health Leads is a priority for many schools in Board X. However, other people's time is out of the control of the administrator. Ongoing interactions and connections with the ABA and Mental Health leads will be necessary to see that the third solution is going to find success. These two experts will guide the altering and improving of behaviour plans for unregulated students. That process takes time and consistent nudges from administration advocating for attention to the needs within a specific school.

### **Success Plan on Becoming a Trauma-Informed School**

The suggested solutions to address the PoP will use the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) model for assessing progress and will be integrated into the implementation plan discussed in Chapter three. The PDSA cycle will test for the improvement resulting from the OIP. When a change idea is developed, the PDSA cycle offers small scale testing using a structured approach. Allowing the administrator to determine if using a trauma-informed approach with students at St. David's school decreases challenging behaviours. When assessing the data gathered, the administrator will be looking for what was learned, what worked and what did not. That will determine if the change will be adopted or abandoned.



*Figure 3. The Deming's Wheel (PDSA Cycle). Adapted from Evolution of the PDCA Cycle R. Moen and C. Norman, 2009, p. 9. J. Ritsma, 2020.*

This model for improvement offers a framework for designing, testing and carrying out changes that will lead to improvement.

Moen, R. (2009) states the PDSA stages:

1. Plan: Plan a test or change aimed at improvement
2. Do: Carry out the change or test (preferably on a small scale)
3. Study: Study the result, what did we learn? What went wrong?
4. Act: Adopt the change, abandon it or run through the cycle again (p. 8).

As an approach, involving stakeholders in the process by seeking feedback and collectively planning the change to improve practice and decrease student behaviours and adjusting plans as necessary. Carrying out the change through accessing the offered resources during professional learning opportunities will allow regular collaborative meeting times to discuss and reflect on learning and applying the change goals as work with students is done differently. The study piece within the cycle allows for a re-evaluation and adjustment based on how staff are proceeding within the process. The plan is not a linear one, but more fluid due to

the staff's differing starting points within the growth process of this plan change and touchbacks may be necessary.

Tracking the amount of time or duration of time students are being removed from the classroom or are on reduced days or possibly in an alternate learning location due to behaviours is a good beginning good measure. Is this decreasing? That is our goal. Ongoing conversations with staff to debrief interactions that occur before escalating student behaviours can be documented and used as a frame of reference to determine whether the learning stance of being proactive in approaches with students is effective. Are there check-ins with the most vulnerable students? Are staff mitigating circumstances that trigger known behaviours? These conversations will prompt accountability as staff learn to use an asset/strength-based approach and be trauma-sensitive and promote student self-regulation. If this is not happening, then going back and reassessing and considering the learning will be required. If not, then what was the barrier for staff not doing this? If so, then identifying if it is a universal issue with the change plan or is it an individual that needs more specific mentoring or support with the change plan process.

### **Leadership Ethics and Organizational Change**

The concerns addressed through the problem of practice consider the ethical responsibility of staff in realizing the educator's role as a teacher of the whole child. With a need to consider the impact of trauma on students and recognize the role they play in contributing to student behaviours, which in turn impacts student learning. Tirri and Hussu (2002) state that "for trusting and workable relationships to exist for educators, it is not enough that educators be understood as being pro-kids" (p.79). It is essential for teachers to be seen as people who are responsible, caring and capable of looking after children while they are in school (Tirri and Hussu, 2002). The goal for staff is to develop a more profound responsibility in broadening

learning to support all types of students, even those that offer significant challenges. This responsibility must be recognized by teachers themselves as they must be more than a pedagogical expert (Day, 2000).

It is essential to recognize the connection between the trauma that some students and their families have lived with or currently live within and the role staff can play to develop trust and build relationships. The school can offer opportunities for parent learning and connect them to available outside services that they would find suitable to support their needs. The goal at St. David's school community is to promote a culture change to one of acceptance and accountability for staff to interact positively and support both the students and their families developing a norm of inclusion. According to Fullan and Quinn (2016), the necessary conditions for deep learning and capacity building led by the principal and superintendents include:

1. They model being lead learners. They don't send people to capacity building sessions but learn alongside them
2. They shape a culture that fosters an expectation of learning for everyone, taking risks and making mistakes but learning from them
3. They build capacity vertically and horizontally in the organization with persistence and single-mindedness until it affects learning. (p. 100)

These three conditions to build capacity are ones the principal will attend to when having direct contact and daily interactions with staff and students and driving the change plan forward. The superintendent will be aware of but not directly involved in the change process. The positive culture of St. David's is well established and highlighted with a committed pedagogical stance to student learning. There is an ethical commitment to student success that will support the likelihood of a successful outcome from the change process. This commitment to their

teaching profession is seen when staff connect independently to divisional planning and idea-sharing outside of direction from the administrator. Burnes (2009) states “that there is a strong relationship between an organization’s ethics, that is, the norms of behavior of an organization’s members, and its culture” (p. 361). Staff professional learning will look at the research on trauma, inclusive of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) childhood questionnaire. Collectively working as a staff to investigate the connection between the high ACE levels in relation to student behavioural challenges will promote the staff to more readily adopt the goal of becoming a more trauma-sensitive school and attend to the students and families impacted by high ACEs.

### **Transformational Approach/Ethics**

The transformational leadership approach will guide the work throughout the Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP). According to Dvir, Eden, Avolio and Shamir (2002):

Transformational leaders exhibit charismatic behaviors, arouse inspirational motivation, provide intellectual stimulation, and treat followers with individualized consideration and these behaviors transform their followers helping them to reach their full potential and generate the highest levels of performance” (p. 736).

Treating both staff and students with consideration is non-negotiable as a school administrator, especially within a faith-based school like St. Davids. Many faith-based schools have similar themes within their vision and mission statements, which are an ethical reference of the calling to serve others. Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB, 2018) mission and value statements:

We believe...

1. In the worth and dignity of every person.



2. In the critical role that our Catholic schools play in promoting Gospel values, social justice, environmental responsibility, human solidarity and the common good.
3. That high standards and expectations foster greater achievement.
4. That people thrive in a safe, healthy and compassionate environment grounded in respect for the diversity of every person.
5. That teaching is responsive to individual needs.
6. That teaching and learning should be rooted in research and evidence.
7. That each of us shares responsibility for creating collaborative communities of learning.
8. That equity, diversity, accessibility and inclusivity are integral to the Catholic community.
9. That the 21st century competencies – collaboration, real world problem solving and innovation, knowledge construction, skilled communication, self-regulation and the use of information communication technology for learning, are essential. (TCDSB, 2018, para. 4)

TCDSB is an “inclusive learning community rooted in the love of Christ. We educate students to grow in grace and knowledge and to lead lives of faith, hope and charity” (TCDSB, 2018, para.4). St. David’s and the Board X Mission and Vision statements embody with similar tenets found within those of TCDSB. However, the TCDSB asks that staff respond to individual needs, root teaching and learning in research and evidence, and recognize self-regulation as necessary competency. The OIP asks staff to have a stance of social justice in recognition that the teaching skills do not align with some student’s specific needs and ethically that needs to be addressed. This OIP offers a framework that plans a change, carries it out, studies the collected data and then determines the next steps; this aligns with the TCDSB mission for staff to plan and

teach using research and evidence. Finally, TCDSB recognizes self-regulation as a necessary competency within the school. The focus of this OIP is how to support students to become self-regulated, manage their behaviours and remain in the school. TCDSB draws attention to the fact that some students routinely struggle with this by including it in their mission statement.

Working within the elementary school environment offers educators many opportunities to show compassion, care, and empathy as students in classrooms are in early developmental stages and arrive from diverse backgrounds. Ensuring that all students are treated equitably and ethically is expected for staff at St. David's. That means improving staff practices through increased collaborative learning opportunities focused on supporting students. The role of the transformational change leader is to motivate staff to understand that the wellness of students and families being served is information as essential as a diagnostic assessment for curriculum planning. Professional learning to support becoming a trauma-informed school needs to be viewed as necessary as curriculum professional learning that occurs in the school. Burns' (1978) beliefs on transformational leadership approach state that, "as a form of leadership where relationships are organized around a common purpose in ways that transform, motivate, and enhance the actions and ethical aspirations of followers" (as cited in Simóla, Barling & Turner, 2011, p.230).

Beginning the change plan process with professional learning taken from the following resources; the SMH- ASSIST Support Model for school mental health and well-being, the Sanctuary Model and the Wisconsin Trauma-Sensitive Schools Fidelity Tool to collectively transform and enhance practice as Burns (1978) suggests. However suitable, yet revealing, conversations about some of the student's and family's realities need to be a precursor to the use

of supportive resources. This will provoke a moral and ethical response to absorb the learning and adopt the suggested practice in a more impactful way.

### **Authentic Approach/Ethics**

Authentic leadership is embedded in the change plan approach. Avolio, Luthans, and Walumbwa (2004) define authentic leaders as:

those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character (p.4).

The authentic leadership approach suits the staff and leaders due to the nature of the relationships in place that are honest, consistent and student-focused. Most staff have a student-first mindset. Putting the needs of the student first is very prevalent and allows for this type of change plan to begin. According to Burnes (2009), the predominant Emergent approach over the last couple of decades has been focused on “power and politics to bring about change” (p.359). A data-driven focus is present in the education system, with performance scores used as the predictor of success. The problem of practice discussed in this paper asks for consideration that is more ethically focused and morally driven. The change plan is focused more on student wellness and regulation as a baseline versus an academic diagnostic. We will be looking to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) generalized scores to prompt the starting point for learning and not curriculum data to draw conclusions for planning. Enrich et al. (2015) “emphasizes the need for ethical leadership characteristics by moral, ethical and professional dimensions that are likely to produce improvements in student learning and contribute to the life chances of all students” (p. 198). The authentic leader would identify with the need to recognize

that the strengths and perspectives of staff are not currently where they need to be and develop a deeper professional understanding of how to better serve students in need.

At this time staff members are not fully aware of or educated on trauma-informed practices. Using an asset-based and trauma-informed approach with students throughout St. David's school is the goal. The plan for change to realize this culture shift for all will be outlined in the following chapter.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Implementation, Evaluation and Communication**

Board X, the school board that oversees St. David's elementary school, is one that is committed to serving students. Their mission is to support the whole child, inclusive of all students, committed to mental health and well-being and aligns resources to support the board vision (Board X, 2019). The core values of Board X promote the development of positive places of learning, the care of all persons, with stewardship that honours the inclusive success and dignity of all. The OIP is designed to increase learning for staff to better support students who are not thriving within St. David's school due to their challenging behaviours. Caring and intentional support is offered to students. Still, there is a lack of awareness and understanding of these students' unique needs and inadequate staff learning opportunities for being trauma-sensitive and how to serve these students best. In this chapter, I outline the priorities of the implementation steps or strategies within the implementation plan, monitoring considerations and communication priorities. I end with a discussion of how this is supported by the Change Path Model as well as future steps and considerations.

#### **Change Implementation Plan**

The role of the leader/administrator of the building is to recognize the need for change. A responsive leader in education finds the gaps and works to fill them. Intentional leadership practices offer strategies and guidelines for leaders to follow when responding to a need and closing a gap. Educational leaders in Ontario are directed to the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) to use as a guide in their work. Making a transformation and influencing a culture shift at St. David's will be implemented following the guidelines of organized leadership practices.

Throughout the OIP process, the OLF guidelines will be consulted, particularly the three pillars of developing people, developing the organization, and building relationships (OLF, 2013, p.13).

As stated in the PoP, there is a group of students at St. David's who are not thriving, and a revision needs to occur to address this problem. The plan will include the exposure to the ACE study and the use of three resources: the School Mental Health Model for school mental health and well-being, the Sanctuary Model, which is a theory-based, trauma-informed, whole culture approach that has a clear and structured methodology for creating and changing organizational culture and finally the Wisconsin Trauma-Sensitive Schools Fidelity Tool. The change plan will follow The Change Path Model (Cawsey et al., 2016) as outlined in Chapter Two.

School administrators can observe a global view of the scenarios that unfold within the school setting. They are particularly aware of students with unregulated behaviours as this often results in a call to the principal by the teacher or support staff for back- up support and to assist in deescalating a situation. These calls for back-up occur when a member staff determines the situation is out of control and unsafe for themselves, other students or the student demonstrating the behaviour. These scenarios are often a lengthy process due to multiple conversations and unpacking of information, leaving the administrator with a story. This story is one that has many parts and nuances to it. It is never one to be left at face value and always calls for investigative type responses to determine who was involved, and were the routine protocols and routines followed before the escalation resulting in the call for administrative support? Depending on the significance of the episode, the investigation may call for multi-group conversations with the staff member directly involved, the students involved, the student who exhibited the unpreferred behaviour, as well as the parents of that student and if other students were impacted or harmed, those parents as well. Depending on the severity of the episode, sometimes conversations with

the superintendent are necessary to advise them in the event parents call to report the incident, especially should it be an ongoing situation. As well, union representatives may become engaged on the teacher's behalf; this will happen when the staff believes the incident deems the school an unsafe work environment. Unravelling the 'ins and outs' and determining improved outcomes for next time is an endeavour that requires genuine stakeholders to be in relationship with the change leader. The four steps outlined within Cawsey et al., (2016) Change Path Model guide the change plan, and each step has multiple tenets within it to direct the necessary culture shift at St. David's.

### **Awakening the Organizational Vision**

As part of the awakening stage of implementation, which considers how to inform and inspire the staff about the overall plan for change, the following strategies will be introduced and discussed. The change plan in its entirety will be an eighteen-month learning experience for staff in response to gaps in how well our students with behavioural needs are presently being served. For the change to thrive and be successful, change leaders need to be well-informed about how to implement appropriate organizational changes that will be embraced by their employees (Armenakis and Harris, 2009). For the change leader, this means ensuring the change process is openly communicated and being proactively aware of the impact on the staff involved. When planning and implementing change, the change leader must communicate the process once designed and with an openness to being flexible based on staff feedback. Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) suggest that to decrease resistance to change, educating people beforehand is necessary. The communication of ideas can help people to see the need for and the relevance of a proposed change (Kotter and Schlesinger, 2008). The success of the implementation plan hinges on staff

embracing this change and embedding it in their teaching as they offer student supports that are not routine within their teaching repertoire.

In this first stage of awakening, the challenge is to communicate to staff the reasons why we need a change at St. David's school. Staff are aware that it is not acceptable that some students are not regulated at school, my job is to enlighten them of the responsibility to react to this need and see that the proposed plan will address this issue. The staff will have the opportunity to participate in a question/answer exchange with their colleagues to define what challenging behaviours are and reasons why they may be occurring. The thought exchange platform will be used to present the open questions and allow for responses to be viewed collectively and within a whole group setting. This process invites collaborative discussions to occur and begin to answer the question of why change? Alongside this, staff will be asked to complete a version of the WTSSF tool. This tool will paint a picture of the school prior to the implementation of the trauma-sensitive learning. It will also help shape the conversations with staff around what it means to be trauma-sensitive. The completed WTSSF tool responses will be communicated with staff as a source of data collection to gauge their understanding of how well-informed staff are about the impact of trauma. The tool will be offered again post-professional learning to compare the data and reveal if growth in understanding has occurred. Exposure to the ACE factors, Sanctuary Model for being trauma-informed and building mental health awareness about students will be shared with staff during the professional learning opportunities in the school throughout the eighteen-month change plan. The challenge for the change leader will be to communicate the vision for change to staff in ways that they will understand and move them positively forward.



Armenakis and Harris (2009), state that change within an organization is expected, and that “no organization has ever been immune to implementing organizational change” (p. 127). The primary consideration must be on the staff members and their understanding and commitment to the expected altered approach with students with challenging behaviours. With sufficient information shared, staff will be motivated to more fully support these students. Staff need access to the resources and leadership guidance to gain the knowledge to do this successfully.

The key stakeholders within the change implementation plan are students, parents, staff and the Board support team. These are the people embedded within the change plan and being asked to make the change. There is an expectation from all agencies that engage within the education system that all students are well served. Policies and protocols are in place to see that education is available to students, regardless of their needs. The Human Rights Code, the Education Act, the Ministry of Education, Board X, and St. Davids school all have clear expectations on students having full access to education in Ontario. The plan for change looks at the most effective and efficient manner to address student behaviours. There is a need for additional learning to become trauma-informed and build awareness of mental health for those who support the students. Parents, staff, and students all need to develop a schema in how these two issues affect young people and what can be done to reduce the problems resulting from them. Building this knowledge will be done using in an authentic and transformational manner, as it is a team approach in building capacity for all. The agenda for change will be an open and honest one designed to benefit the students ethically and intentionally. The stakeholders have engaged in previous successful change milestones at St. David’s, which adds credence to the OIP

as respectful authenticity, openness to feedback, commitment and evidence of walking the talk is present. Leithwood (2012) as stated in Katz, Dack and Malloy (2018) states that

a culture that focuses on positive relationships and capacity building prioritizes listening to others and responding equitably, respecting and leveraging the experience and expertise of all members of the staff and celebrating everyone's accomplishment (p. 44).

A staff currently motivated to learn and engage collaboratively offers an increased chance of success for the change implementation plan to occur. This ongoing learning is collaborative with the leader as a co-learner, not a top-down approach. Working alongside the staff and parents to build knowledge and understanding of how to be trauma-sensitive and promote mental health wellness can improve success for all students in any school organization. Katz, Dack and Malloy (2018) indicate that learning and collaboration are at the "center of positive cultures as everyone in the school knows how important it is to continue learning in order to serve students more effectively" (p. 44).

Staff members have communicated that they have not received professional learning nor have a full understanding of the impact trauma and mental health effects can have on students and their learning and development experiences. Ongoing conversations and anecdotal comments indicate that staff members would welcome the opportunity to become better informed on how to be trauma-sensitive using the ACE factors. As a group, the staff is in a good state as they recognize a need in students, making this a prime environment for this work to occur. Observations of students and families who struggle indicate that our intervention is needed and would be welcomed by some. Daily engagement with students and access to families in need offers an opportunity to promote mental health and trauma-informed learning in the school and offer outside supports. Students are our captive audience, and staff can capitalize on this which

can be the turning point for many young people who have little support (Chilton, Pearson & Anderson, 2015; O'Mara & Lind, 2013; Weare & Nind, 2011, as cited in the School Years Evidence Brief, SMH-ASSIST, 2016).

The board Mental Health lead has embraced the idea of the proposal and indicated a willingness to support the planned change moving forward. Those involved are looking for ways to identify student's behaviour needs and together build capacity, both parents and staff, to create a partnership and become more trauma-sensitive and build resiliency in students. Approval to move forward with staff learning and development has been given, using a team approach with both the Mental Health lead and ABA lead. The learning will begin with familiarizing all staff on the ACE factors and becoming trauma-informed on how these factors can result in behaviours by students who are not demonstrating typical behaviours when presented with routine requests. The goal is for staff to develop and implement effective support strategies to reduce the interfering student behaviours. This learning will include the parent community to increase the circle of security supporting student needs.

The change plan identifies and proposes actions that align with the vision, mission and core values of Board X. Observations and conversations suggest that our students and families are experiencing varying levels of trauma in their lives, which impacts the coping mechanisms of some students—particularly their mechanism to regulate themselves in situations that would be considered routine and non-threatening. Staff routinely take anecdotal notes about students, and these documentations indicate that some students regularly engage in aggressive and sometimes violent acts in the school. The change plan asks staff to consider that some students are impacted by trauma, and possible mental health aspects are at play, and these behaviours are the result of

those effects. Special education support staff and board level special educational supports are available; however, they are limited.

When looking towards mental health, trauma and behaviour, there is a gap in the support services some schools can offer. Manion (2010) offers that “approximately 14–25% of Canadian children and youth have a diagnosable mental disorder. With fewer than 25% of those with such disorders receiving specialized services” (p.50). Within Board X, information on good practices in supporting mental health and trauma-induced behaviour is increasing; however, professional learning opportunities in Board X are limited and not fully embedded into the stream of learning opportunities presented to staff members. Some research on the promotion and awareness building of mental health and trauma-informed practices within school staff learning opportunities refers to accessing a school team. This team includes mental health professionals, social workers, and psychiatrists who are brought in to lead learning with staff on how to best support students with needs. When considering the change plan model for St. David’s school, it is essential to note the size of Board X does not allow for such a team to exist. There is a referral process that can result in ABA (Applied Behaviour Analysis) support, counselling sessions with a child and youth worker or mental health nurse support.

Professional learning opportunities are most often led by the building administration supported by the Mental Health lead, who is a social worker by profession. Minimal access to a trained support team offers an inequity for some schools due to the disadvantage of not having access to skilled support for students with challenging behaviours. The need for early-stage teacher/staff professional learning in mental health and trauma-informed awareness should be a priority. Fazel et al. (2014) believe that training teachers in “mental health promotion skills might not only assist in identification and referral for children who need it but also help teachers feel

less overwhelmed by the emotional and behavioural challenges in their classrooms” (p. 8). Until this time, St. David’s school will be implementing a change process focused on the development of a clear and intentional plan to become trauma-informed and work to develop a school culture promoting student well-being and developing resilient learners. The change process is mobilized and described in the following sections.

### **Mobilizing the Change Process**

This Mobilization stage (Cawsey et al., 2016) of planning will build the foundation for which the change plan will develop. Creating the professional learning sessions for staff collectively with the two leads who hold the expertise, who understand the stakeholders, will allow for the content to specifically address the deficits in understanding. This collective approach will help build the solid foundation that Fullan and Quinn (2016) indicate is necessary for building capacity, promoting engagement and committing to the strategy for achievement.

Within this stage, the formal communication and plan development to determine the facilitation and available support with the ABA and Mental Health leads will happen. Manageable and intentional professional learning sessions will take place with staff and parents, and focus on trauma-informed practices and building mental health awareness. In the pursuit of implementing change and building capacity in the staff through developing a common knowledge and skillset is critical. According to Fullan and Quinn (2016), the capacity-building approach establishes a foundation for sustainable improvement as it does the following:

- Mobilizes a growth mind set at all levels of the system.
- Sustains and cultivates improved student (staff) learning.
- Builds a common knowledge base and set of skills at all levels of the system.
- Focuses on collaborative learning.

- Emphasizes collective capacity, which engages everyone in the system with clear goals and commitment to the strategy for achievement.
- Incorporates a learning cycle of new learning, application on the job, reflection, and dialogue with colleagues. (p. 58)

The gaps identified, which prompted the need for a change plan include two areas for staff learning and include the development of trauma-awareness and mental health needs in students.

**Developing Awareness- Mentally Healthy Schools- Tier One Resource.** School Mental Health ASSIST (SMH -ASSIST) helps Ontario school boards build capacity to support student mental health and well-being. The SMH-ASSIST Leading Mentally Healthy Schools - A Resource for School Administrators discusses the Aligned and Integrated Model to support school mental health and well-being, which focuses on the elements for creating and maintaining mentally healthy classrooms and schools. The base of the tier (Tier 1) is of interest as it indicates a universal approach, which aligns with the plan to build capacity and develop a culture of care at St. David's which supports all students but particularly for those who are frequently unregulated. The Tiered Support Model (2013) identifies the necessary components of strong leadership at the school and classroom level. Stating that:

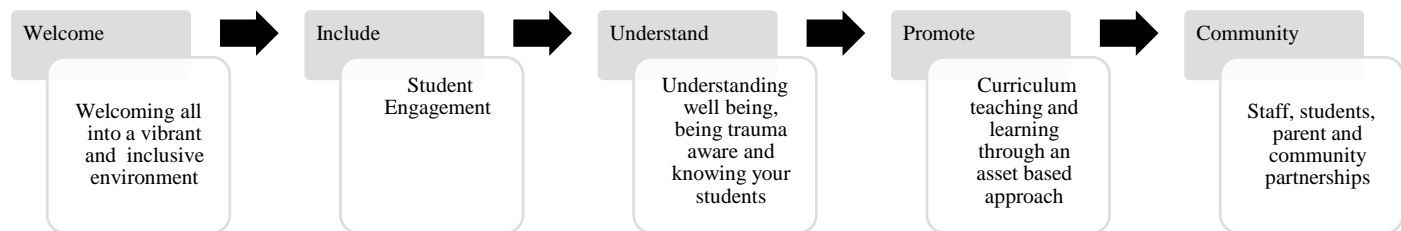
when educators welcome, include, promote, know, and partner, students have a better sense of belonging at school, and can feel confident that there are caring adults in the building who they can turn to if they are having difficulties academically, socially, behaviorally, or emotionally (SMH-ASSIST, 2013, p. 7).

Within SMH-ASSIST (2013) Tier 1 Good for all Students are goals for staff to bring into practice, which include:

- Develop meaningful relationships.

- Know your students.
- Form genuine connections with students. (p. 8)

These goals address the needs within the PoP and offer a subtle focus for changed practices that is not intrusive. Figure 4 below demonstrates the AIM tier 1 (SMH- ASSIST, 2013) base that the school will be following.



*Figure 4. Mental health and well-being. Aligned and Integrated Model (AIM) Tier 1: Good for All Students. (adapted from SMH- ASSIST, 2013). J.Ritsma, 2020.*

**Developing a Trauma-Informed School- Sanctuary Change Model Resource.** The school will use the four pillars within the Sanctuary Model (Bloom, 2007) framework to guide the work in this area moving forward; shared knowledge, shared values, shared language, and shared practice. To address the PoP within St. David’s, the model will be used as an organizational culture intervention, to develop skills for students, staff, and the community. Bloom (2007) suggests this “will support the work to counteract the biological, emotional, cognitive, social, and moral experiences suffered by the victims of traumatic experience and extended exposure to adversity” (sanctuaryweb.com. para.4)

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) (Felitti et al. 1998) study provides documentation regarding the link between specific childhood experiences and the effects on later disorders and behaviours. The collective number from within the eight categories is considered the ACE score, which essentially represents the “trauma dose” (Bloom, 2007, p. 12) that have impacted these children. One of the goals at St. David’s school is for staff to become trauma-

informed and better serve those students with behaviours that interfere with their social, emotional and academic development. Bloom (2007) states that “to create a truly trauma-informed treatment culture requires trauma-specific treatment approaches that help psychologically injured people to heal” (p. 8). While the school environment is not a treatment facility, it is an environment of care and learning where children and many families gather five days a week, making it a place that could impact healing through relationship and trust-building. Supporting students with behavioural needs versus marginalizing them is a goal. Bloom (2007) indicates that:

People need to stop viewing others as either sick or bad and begin to view these problems as the result of injuries, some to the body, some to the mind, some to the ability to relate, some to the sense of right and wrong, and some to the soul. (p. 13)

Using this framework to drive the learning for staff asks for a shift in mindset by recognizing that applying the suggested strategies may assist staff in the work they do with students each day. This is what makes the Sanctuary Change framework the best fit for driving the change forward for staff at St. David’s. Moreover, it will be reflected as staff members grow a more comprehensive understanding of the student population, their needs, and how to support them better.

Bloom suggests that those working with a population that has faced trauma can cause stress. Bloom (2007) states that due to this stress, “it is relatively easy to lose sight of the mission, goals and values that should guide the work. Over time, stressed systems can become reactive, change-resistant, hierarchical, coercive, and punitive” (p. 13). Some of these signs of stress are visible at St. David’s and prompted the development of the PoP and, ultimately, the investigation into the OIP for change. The school environment can become stressed when there



are students, families and staff who become unsettled by a change. The change being referred to is a growing number of students demonstrating complex behaviours in the school. As students' behaviours increase and become more aggressive, staff become reactive due to a sense of lost control or student non-compliance, and the frequent response becomes punitive. These increases in behaviours affect the support staff, parents and administrators as they are called to manage and support them.

The Sanctuary Change Model is a trauma-informed approach that looks to assist in developing a culture that supports those recovering from the impact of trauma. This model offers trauma-specific treatment approaches, where Bloom (2007) believes that our “growing knowledge about the short and long-term effects of chronic stress and repetitive trauma requires a shift in the way we view all human problematic behavior” (p. 13). The change plan within the PoP is focused on this planned shift making it a worthy model. However, there are some limitations observed within the Sanctuary Change Model, primarily that it is a client-based approach and not aligned with a school environment. The research indicates that the Sanctuary Change Model has been used in a wide range of settings, including:

residential treatment settings for children or adults, acute care inpatient units, substance abuse programs, domestic violence shelters, homeless shelters, group homes, day hospitals, intensive outpatient programs and have had an opportunity to create environments that are intrinsically humane, as well as healing and health promoting (Bloom, 2007, p. 13).

Selected tenets from within this model will be adapted to suit the school environment with the hope that the modifications to the plan will not affect the planned results,

There are “seven dominant characteristics, all of which serve goals that simultaneously create a sound treatment environment while counteracting the impact of chronic and unrelenting stress” (Bloom, 2007, p. 14). These characteristics include what are described as “cultures”:

1. Culture of Nonviolence – building and modelling safety skills and a commitment to higher goals
2. Culture of Emotional Intelligence – teaching and modelling emotional management skills and the integration of thoughts and feelings
3. Culture of Social Learning – building and modelling cognitive skills in an environment that promotes conflict resolution and transformation
4. Culture of Shared Governance – creating and modelling civic skills of self-control, self-discipline, and administration of healthy authority
5. Culture of Open Communication – overcoming barriers to healthy communication, reducing acting out, enhancing self-protective and self-correcting skills, teaching healthy boundaries
6. Culture of Social Responsibility – rebuilding social connection skills, establishing healthy attachment relationships
7. Culture of Growth and Change – working through loss; restoring hope, meaning, and purpose (p.14)

The dominant characteristics within the Sanctuary Change Model align with many of the expectations and norms within an elementary school setting. They also use similar language as both the authentic and transformational approaches to change, such as communication, social connection, healthy relationships, and commitment to higher goals, modelling and transformation. All staff, administration, students will implement this model and, hopefully,

parents. Farragher and Yanosy, 2005 (as cited in Bloom, 2017) state that “effective implementation of the Sanctuary Model® requires extensive leadership involvement in the process of change, as well as staff and client involvement at every level of the process” (p. 14). The term client for the OIP environment will refer to the student. This model was specifically selected as it is designed to support a culture change and fulfill a specific need in those having experienced trauma. This model intends to build capacity with staff and improve practices for those who support children/adults impacted by trauma and are not thriving.

Many successful models support change practice; however, the Sanctuary Change Model recognizes that trauma impacts children, and with trauma-sensitive training and support, they can fully engage in the routine environment. The staff at St. David’s are beginning to observe the correlation between students with behaviours and experienced trauma, making this model the best fit for the change plan.

### **Mobilization of Staff Development**

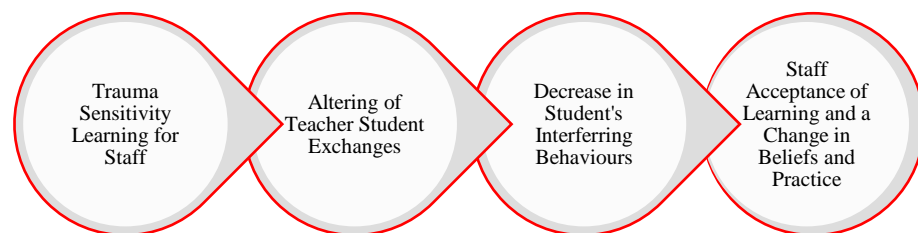
The Mobilization stage indicates the need for change leaders to leverage their personality, skills and knowledge for the benefit of the change vision and its implementation (Cawsey et al., 2016). As a change leader prepared to ignite change it is a benefit that my relationship with staff members is positive and well established as I am asking staff to step forward and make a difference for students. Staff will be involved in professional learning sessions at the school for 2.5 days in 2020-21 school year. The goal of the change plan is for staff to develop a deeper understanding of student behaviours, what provokes them and how to best respond to them.

Staff will become familiar with the ACE factors that result in students being traumatized and affect their skills to respond to situations routinely. Secondly, the staff will build awareness

of how their interactions with students can potentially provoke these behaviours in students.

Professional learning for staff development will be using two resources, the Sanctuary Model resource and SMH-ASSIST AIM Tier 1 resource.

The typical goals of professional learning are to improve teacher practice and influence student success. Teachers participate in professional development for a variety of reasons, some may be intrinsically motivated, and some not. The outcome for most would be to emerge with an increased knowledge of the topic and with some practical ideas to improve practice. Gusky (1986) believes that the typical teacher professional learning sessions are flawed, by first trying to change teachers' beliefs and attitudes and assuming this will automatically lead to change in their behaviours and practices. Gusky (2002) has proposed an alternate model to teacher change, where teachers are first engaged in staff development, exposing them to a new strategy or approach which is linked to rationale that will enhance student learning, see Figure 5. First is the suspension of the teachers' beliefs, then implementing the strategy that is going to find greater success of the changed practice. It is when the teacher sees the resulting student success that they alter their own beliefs and attitudes about the new approach, but not until seeing the advantage for their students do they fully adopt the change in beliefs and attitudes.



*Figure 5. Model of teacher change (adapted from Guskey, 1986). J.Ritsma, 2020.*

Adhering to Guskey's model of teacher change, the development of staff allows for learning to take place and to build a closer awareness of how adults interact and support students with behavioural challenges. The completion of the Wisconsin Trauma-Sensitive Schools Fidelity Tool, the Thought Exchange activity, and follow up Professional Development learning will allow for staff development. The new knowledge will alter teacher practices, resulting in a change in student behaviours, and this success will lead to a change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes.

### **Propelling Stakeholders Connections to the Change Process**

Stakeholder reactions and being proactive in the planned approach to change is crucial. For this OIP, teaching and support staff reactions and readiness for implementation is being considered. As indicated in chapter one, Cawsey et al. (2016) Rating the Organization Readiness for Change indicates a score that promotes the chances for a high rate of success for the proposed change implementation plan. In some scenarios, it is noted that teachers can be resistant to change for a variety of reasons, however, specifically concerning workload and feelings of being ill-equipped. As well, change may entail disruption to comfortable routines.

Professional learning is not always positively viewed by staff as it can reduce their time for marking or preparation and may result in feelings of inadequacy, making it an unwelcome interruption for some (Cooper, Levin and Campbell 2009, cited in Dudar, Scott and Scott 2017). Being well connected with the St. David's staff and having open and honest relationships, this plan's change process is one that has the potential to transition smoothly. Effective change implementation requires the administrator to be communicative and have the teachers' perspectives at the forefront of the change process.

The actions of staff within a change process can make or break it as they are the key stakeholders upon which change implementation rests (Fullan, 2008, cited in Dudar et al., 2017). There is a need to bridge connections for the staff, as there are ongoing conversations focused on their unhappiness and disgruntled feelings regarding students with behavioural challenges and the lack of professional learning opportunities to support this work. It is anticipated that the change plan will result in a culture shift in how we view and engage with students and families where behaviour is the root of the conversation, altering assumptions about both the students who struggle and their families. Fullan (2008), as cited in Dudar et al., (2017), noted that “teachers want to be better teachers for their students” and that “because they want to become better teachers... [and professional development is perceived] as the most promising and readily available route to growth on the job” (p. 48). All available opportunities will be monopolized with staff to engage in capacity building conversations to increase their sense of responsibility to become trauma-informed and develop a sensitivity regarding families’ needs.

I will use the Thought Exchange crowdsourcing platform and the Wisconsin Trauma-Sensitive Schools Fidelity Tool to gather staff knowledge of trauma impact. Professional Development days will provide the time to build the capacity of the need for change and to consider the needs of students and families. This work will be supported by the school ABA and Mental health leads, along with opportunities to build connections with the local community support services available to support the students and their families along the process. Intentional invitations for staff to highlight successful practices and interactions with the students and their families may aid in empowering other staff members and promote the change plan

Conversations, meetings, team meetings and professional learning opportunities will determine the current mindset of the staff members and the potential resistance to change and guide the change process.

### **Supporting the plan's Acceleration**

Continuing to address the PoP within the Acceleration stage, means “bringing it to life” (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 54). In this stage, I will meet with the staff to gather the initial information through the Thought Exchange activity. This stage is imperative as it will build trust, bring out assumptions and prepare staff about the new learning moving forward.

The work of change leaders is to challenge workers to develop new competencies, which include adaptability, systems thinking, and an openness to learning (Austin and Harkins, 2008). The development of the professional learning community beginning with the Thought Exchange platform allows for sharing of ideas, rating the ideas of the comments posted and the opportunity to dig deep into the responses offered to the open questions posed on the platform. This initial session will open thinking and allow the group to consider the multiple stakeholders, including themselves, parents and board support staff.

The results of the Thought Exchange and WTSSF Tool will be used to determine the direction of the next steps depending on the beliefs and assumptions revealed. These results will be compiled and analyzed by the principal, the Mental Health lead and the ABA lead collectively. Transition management will be essential as we unpack the results as there will be some expected responses to the questions; however, there is a need to be flexible in planning the next forward moves as there could be unexpected results. The Acceleration forward will still happen, but the focused content within the professional learning sessions will be adjusted as the entry point is determined from the WTSSF Tool and Thought Exchange responses.

While the stages within a change process can appear to be linear, this is not the reality of the change process. Unanticipated changes can occur along the pathway resulting in the need to adjust the course. Cawsey, et al. (2016), likens the managing of change while operating the organization to “changing the tire on a moving car” (p. 54). Adaptations will occur as needed along the pathway as a necessary step to achieve the desired outcome of becoming trauma-informed and building a deeper awareness of mental health.

**Acceleration – staff plan.** The professional learning opportunities for teachers will take place during the school professional development days offered in the school over the 2020-2021 school year and led by the principal, the Mental Health and ABA lead support staff. There are 2.5 board approved Professional Development days with release time for staff to participate in professional learning. Learning will include time to build capacity on becoming trauma-informed, an awareness of the mental health needs in students, ABA implications to mitigate student behaviours and how to include parents along the journey. The three learning opportunities will take place in the Fall of 2020, the winter of 2021 and June 2021.

Schools Mental Health Ontario (SMHO, 2020) “indicate that schools are an excellent place to promote mental health, notice concerns early, offer services, and provide ongoing support” (Para. 4). To organize the various supports and services most suited to the school setting, leaders in this area promote a continuum of care, often called a Multi-Tiered System of Support (SMHO, 2020). This tiered support is currently a focus of Board X and directs some of the ongoing work of the Mental Health lead with school principals and board staff. In Ontario, this continuum is depicted using the Aligned and Integrated Model (AIM) (SMH-ASSIST, 2013). This model represents the information that will be shared with staff and the common visual that will direct the learning, primarily the bottom tier 1 as the focus. The work with staff will also



include the ACE factor information, and the Sanctuary Model resources for becoming trauma-informed and resiliency focused.

**Acceleration – parent plan.** The parent learning opportunities will happen in two ways with the involvement of the change leader and the Mental Health and ABA leads. The first learning opportunities will be through direct conversations within the regularly scheduled team meetings with parents. Moving forward, along with the regular agenda in these team meetings will now include information on the ACE factors, the AIM Model (specifically Tier 1) and the Sanctuary Model and making connections to the local support services available to both children and their parents. In school support includes referrals to the in-school counselor and works with both students and their families.

Additionally, there is access to a mental health nurse; both counselling opportunities services are through a referral process completed by the principal or Special Educational Resource Teacher (SERT). The local support services include the Centre for Children and Youth, which is an authorized community-based children's mental health centre. They provide assessment and treatment services of mental health issues for children and youth and can be accessed at the school or the Center through appointment or walk-ins. The two parent information evenings will be held at the school on two separate evenings, one in the Fall and one in the Spring. The evening session will include information on accessing the Centre for Children and Youth through either the school or the Centre. The trauma-informed ACE factors and mental health AIM tiered framework (SMH-ASSIST, 2013), will be shared with parents by the Mental Health lead. The ABA lead will be sharing the value of the ABC data collection and how it is collected and used to inform teaching and learning experiences for students who can become

unregulated. These practices will be shared with parents and how they can be implemented in the home to encourage consistency and decreased behaviour outbursts

### **Institutionalization**

The Institutionalization phase (Cawsey, Deszca & Ingols, 2016) asks for the “monitoring of the progress along the way, including the assessment of when the changes have been incorporated into the fabric of the organization” (p.55). It is an important final stage as the leader must understand the impact of the change and recognize that this depends on the ability to measure the change, indicating success or failure. This realization is what will guide future change process planning.

The measuring of the process changes regarding staff and parent learning and change in practice/awareness is an ongoing observational and anecdotal collection of information. Building capacity and encouraging a shift in culture is difficult to measure as people are implementing their new learning, responses can circumspect, and only when a practice change is embedded can success be celebrated. The quantitative data collection will come with collecting of the pre and post numbers of student and family referrals to our onsite counselor and mental health nurse before and after the learning opportunities. The data collected on the number of students referred to the office for behaviours and noting the difference in the number of students needing a reduced day at school or needing to be working in an alternate learning location will be predictors of success or failure.

The hope is to see some transformation of the practices and a decrease in student behaviours as new knowledge, skills and processes become embedded into practice.

### **Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation**

The short-term goals include gathering staff beliefs of why students demonstrate challenging behaviours. In a whole staff professional learning session, I will set up the questions on the Thought Exchange crowdsourcing platform. The platform allows participants to answer the posed questions and then rate the responses of the other members. Staff bring personal

devices and are given an access code for the Thought Exchange session, which has the questions within it. Everyone has the chance to rate the respondent's answers using a star rating system; four stars indicate the response is highly agreeable to the person rating; one star is not agreeable. I then post the responses on the projector, and we work through the questions identifying the responses indicated highly favourable or not favoured at all and discuss the reasoning and validations of the reactions.

These questions are posed to gather information from staff that may reveal assumptions, gaps in understanding and possibly considerations not considered by the administrator.

Open questions may include:

- Do you believe these students choose to be disruptive, or is it out of their control?
- What factors do believe are at play that may be affecting the student who elevates and becomes disruptive to the point of staff intervention?
- Considering the student with behavioural challenges, do you believe the family to be a part of the team working to support the student?
- Do you believe you have the skill set to best support these students? What professional learning do you think would better support your role with these students?

Asking these questions of staff will generate conversation and draw out any assumptions and give a clear picture of what staff may believe is causing these behaviours in some students. This software has features to gather and organize the data to assist in developing the next steps. Gathering this information is a good starting point to build from and can dispel some assumptions and begin to ignite the change plan process.

In conjunction with the crowdsourcing activity to open the dialogue, staff will be completing a modified version of the Wisconsin Trauma-Sensitive Schools Fidelity Tool. This

tool will indicate the current status of how trauma-informed the staff believe themselves and the organization is; before the implementation of trauma-sensitive learning. It will also shape school conversation around how to become more trauma-sensitive. The WTSSFT modified tool has six sections. It gathers the current state of understanding of how trauma-sensitive the organization is. The sections included within the tool are School Environment, Adult-Student Interactions, Leadership & Practices, Staff Competence & Actions, Discipline and Student Competence & Power. The scoring guidelines within the tool include four potential response options: not in place, minimally in place, partially in place and fully in place. The criteria for each response are detailed below each item. This tool will be offered pre-implementation of the Sanctuary Model and Tier 1 of the SMHSS framework and again post-professional learning. The difference between the two data collections will determine the success of the change process.

The long-term goals will be shared and include the need to build capacity in improving practice and better serving students. The Tier 1 model from SMH-ASSIST will be discussed as well as the Sanctuary Model. Messaging will come with the preface that this is a long-term collaborative process and not an immediate directive but a gradual move in changing how we understand, respond and prepare to meet our students' needs and include parents along the journey.

The goal of the plan change is to be a more trauma-informed group of educators. Staff will recognize the triggers that prompt students to become unregulated and how to be proactive while working with them. Resulting in a decrease in the number of students demonstrating negative behaviours, keep students in class and learning, and increase parent connections and strengthen relationships.

Appendix A outlines the change plan process and indicates the intended goals, plans for implementation, the necessary resources, associated costs and the stakeholders to be most affected throughout the change plan process.

The change implementation plan is one that is reasonable and within the scope of possibility considering the stakeholders involved, the current well-established relationships in place and the general desire of staff in correcting a problem often at the forefront of discussions on student success. Accessing board funding to support the cost of the Sanctuary Model program could be a barrier, however, more likely to occur within the current climate of budget initiatives, which indicates that funds continue to be available to support mental health initiatives for students. Initial information gathering on staff learning development needs on being trauma-informed and mental health/well-being awareness will be collected using the Thought Exchange platform and the WTSSF tool.

Data collection indicating the number of incidents that involve students demonstrating aggressive behaviour will be tracked by the principal. The collection of mental health referrals to the counselor and mental health nurse linked to the school will also be tracked by the principal.

### **Next Steps and Future Considerations**

The change leader will consider the potential barriers that may fall outside the realm of planned control. These are the considerations which may be encountered that could alter the change plan process. The change leader must be prepared in how to best mitigate these potential considerations.

One challenge to consider is access to budget money. While the cost of the Sanctuary Model program will be included in a budget request, there are changes to the allocation of budget lines when the budget money is delivered. The proposed cost being covered is going to be

factored into the Mental Health budget, and until that money is transferred into that budget line, there is always a chance that it will not come through. If this occurs, the learning timeline will be pushed out a bit further, possibly into the next budget year, 2022.

Another challenge will be for staff to embrace the seriousness of the need for a change in practice, to fully process the learning and engage in a mindset shift. The messaging about the plan will be consistent, and the need for it is backed by research. Weare & Nind (2011) state that “school-based programs that foster resilience, character strengths, and empathy provide students with the resources they need to thrive, while allowing them to cope with stress and adverse conditions” (p.i29). There are professional development days with release time available; however, this does not mean staff will become fully engaged in the learning process and embrace the change. Will staff members accept the new learning, adjust their practice, and allow for all students a higher likelihood of thriving at school? Will the learning experiences capture the teachers in a way that they will understand their role in the change process? Fullan and Quinn (2016) share that “deeper learning is the ability to understand the concepts, think critically ...and apply learning in authentic ways” (p. 92). While the opportunity to gather as a staff and participate in professional learning led by the board “experts” is a valuable experience, is it deeper learning? Will this learning be applied to the situations that arise or will teachers default back to known and familiar practices that involve not being fully in relationship with students and not understanding their unique needs. A failure of the plan would see staff continue to send students out of the room with support staff or to the office for punitive action.

Another consideration is the possibility of changes to scheduling. When multiple people are involved in professional learning experiences, there are apt to be absences. This will affect the capacity-building opportunity and potentially weaken the change process. The Mental Health

lead and ABA leads serve fifteen elementary schools and two secondary schools and are a small team in high demand. While the dates will be set well in advance and booked in, there are crisis' that arise and could cause an absence by one of them, who are the key facilitators of the learning. Ensuring access to the learning sessions may require creative solutions should absences occur. Some solutions could include video access, webinar venues or colleague led sessions to share the learned skills and strategies.

It may be challenging to fully engage the parents, as attendance at the evening information sessions is voluntary. There is a trend of low turnout at evening sessions. Offering additional support such as babysitting, food and drink and multiple invitations via high traffic social media and technology communication to encourage awareness and attendance may still result in low turnout. Missing these sessions will decrease the opportunity to build learning in our parent group and to share the importance and awareness of the impact trauma (ACE factors) can have on children and the rising rates of mental health needs in young children. The Government of Canada (2006), *The Human Face of Mental Health and Mental Illness in Canada*, state that "68% of mental health problems begin in childhood and adolescence" (p.34). These sessions are critical to share the information with parents as they are key stakeholders and critical in making positive changes for children.

The research indicates that the involvement of parents has high value and is an essential component in effective interventions involving their children (Weare & Nind, 2011). Catalano et al., (2002) as cited in Weare & Nind, (2011), state that "parental involvement was reported as increasing effectiveness for pro-social youth development" (p. i62). Creative thinking may be needed to ensure that parents have access to this critical information. Sharing links, webinar access and modules that break down the trauma-informed information and mental health

awareness could be an alternate option. While this is a convenient and cost-effective approach, it does come with some exclusionary challenges for those families who do not have technology or access to the school social media accounts.

### **Future Considerations**

As mentioned, the cost of budgeting is a significant concern, especially within a school system where the funding directives are determined by a government group and then again filtered at the board level based on priorities. The Progressive Conservative government announcement of the 2019-20 school board funding announced that “Ontario is cutting the amount of money school boards receive per student, which advocates say will mean fewer services and supports for kids” (Jones, 2019, para. 1). Even when a research-supported plan is presented, and meaningful outcomes indicated, the priorities of the people making the budgeting decisions hold access to funding to support. It will be necessary to react to the potential decrease in access to funding creatively. There are sometimes opportunities to access funding for release time and resources under budgets with a more global heading. Keeping in contact with the Mental Health and ABA leads to stay informed of any upcoming free opportunities, and grant funding access will be a necessary practice to ensure learning for staff and parents.

The sustainability of staff and families becoming trauma-informed is a worthy consideration. Keeping the momentum and energy of this culture change can be promoted by developing a shared language from the training that becomes embedded into conversations, meetings, mission and value statements and ongoing within the school. Focusing on some of the key elements of the training and pulling that asset-based approach and trauma-sensitive language and making it visible in as many instances as possible will aid in the plan becoming lived in the school. Dr. Treisman (2018) describes this as a “hardwiring the language and values” (p. 73) into



the organizational aspects. Along with developing a common language comes the suggestion to create a visible presence in the building sharing the messaging of the change focus. In a school, this can mean sharing the positive messaging through focused bulletin boards, artwork, letterheads and quotes on the walls. Making ideas and concepts visible in the school will support the movement and help to keep it alive (Triesman ,2018).

Another consideration is the potential for an unexpected change in leadership. Administration moves are a frequent occurrence within Board X. This change could result in the new administrator not embodying or valuing the plan change to build the capacity of becoming a trauma-informed and responsive school community. One way to address this potential threat to the ongoing success of the change plan would be to implement the suggestion of Triesman (2018) and form an active change development group or committee and select a committed “trauma-informed champion” (p.72). This would allow for the change process to remain vibrant and driven by intrinsically dedicated staff members. They would continue to build capacity on being trauma-informed and promote using an asset-based approach with students. The guidance of this staff leader would hopefully allow the changed mindset to be maintained and time for the new administrator to settle in and, in time, realize the positive effects of the implementation and support the change.

One final consideration asks the question, is using the ACE scale as a predictive tool for measuring outcomes suitable? Finkelhor (2017) shares that the ACE research has become the inspiration for much of the conversations around policy in the area of child maltreatment in the United States and questions if the “ACE inventory is the best or even adequate tool to predict the health risks for efficiently identifying who will benefit from intervention” (p. 3). The initial research for the ACE development was conducted in an adult Kaiser Permanente medical

practice by physicians who found multiple connections between maltreatment and later severe health outcomes, and this moved the issue of child maltreatment into the worlds of both the public health and medicine (Stevens, 2012). Is it appropriate to use the evidence from this tool designed from the original adult obesity study and then apply it to guiding decisions on child maltreatment planning? The professional health community is questioning this. Stevens (2012) states that

until the last ten months, the medical community practically ignored the ACE Study. Just last December, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a policy statement recommending that its members look for toxic stress in their patients. Except with local exceptions, the public health community has not embraced it. In fact, the CDC — the one agency you might think would use its own research to reorganize how it approaches prevention of alcohol, obesity, sexually transmitted diseases and smoking — has whittled down funding for the ACE Study to practically nothing, and nobody's working on it full time (Stevens, 2012, para. 67).

For now, it is useful to use the ACE tool as a beginning point to build awareness for the staff regarding the impact that traumatic events can have on children's lives and potentially impact their behaviour. However, looking into more updated and child-specific research-based assessment tools may need to be considered.

## **Conclusion**

Within the school system, there is a growing need to develop a deeper understanding of the impact trauma has on students and their families. Globally, there is an increasing amount of research being presented on the positive impact of being trauma-informed, as well as the effects that trauma inflicts on the mental health of those experiencing trauma. There is an ethical

element in the need to respond to this and an urgency to develop the skills of all educators and parents to approach this need with a skill set that will allow students to find greater access and success within the school environment.

Adapting to new learning and adjusting practices to develop a culture of being trauma-sensitive where building relationships, connections and embracing differences with students and parents will become a norm. According to Ko et al. (2008), “trauma confronts schools with a serious dilemma: how to balance their primary mission of education with the reality that many students need help in dealing with traumatic stress to attend regularly and engage in the learning process.” (p. 398). Only when our practices change and this balance is found will students be fully served within our school system.

Some students in our school systems are not thriving, and their behaviours are interfering with their accessibility to academics and social-emotional development due to experienced trauma. Staff and parents must recognize that while these children are not being asked to perform outside of the rational expectations within the school day but grasp that they are not able to do this due to the impact of trauma. We have learned that sometimes children who have been abused and neglected can create disruption and chaos in the classroom (Downey, 2007). However, Downey believes that “traumatized children are challenging; however, when they are responded to with patience and care can come to see school as a safe, supportive place where they can learn and grow” (p.18). This is the end goal and our responsibility to become better informed and reach all students who enter our schools each day.

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**Appendix A***Change implementation process: Goals, implementation, resources, costs, stakeholders*

Goals	Implementation	Resources	Associated Costs	Stakeholders
Building an awareness in staff that the students demonstrating challenging behaviours are not likely choosing to do this, but rather is a response to impact on their lives outside of school	<p>Within staff group meetings sharing conversationally our mission statement to teach to the whole child and being a fully inclusive school board and our responsibility to all students even those that struggle to regulate</p> <p>Honest debriefing sessions following situations where a student has demonstrated challenging behaviours and potentially aggressive/avoidance behaviours.</p> <p>Ensuring staff have access to the appropriate information to ensure they are well informed on their students (within initial team meetings conversations and highlight the need to read the OSR)</p>	An understanding of school and board mission statements and information within the OSR pertaining to student supports/needs that may be documented within	\$0 cost to school budget	Change leader and staff members (all teaching staff and support staff)

Goals	Implementation	Resources	Associated Costs	Stakeholders
Reveal the understanding of staff beliefs on their impact on student behaviours	<p>Author will host a crowd sourcing session to gather data by using intentional questions to glean information regarding the beliefs of staff on how they potentially impact student behaviours.</p> <p>Thought Exchange platform will be used and open-ended questions on student behaviours and topics such as triggers, trauma, choice, parent/home effects will be posed for all to answer</p> <p>Staff then read and respond to all posted (anonymous) responses using a value rating system (reader allocates star 1-4 value to each response)</p> <p>Collaboratively debrief all responses and the values placed by staff on the posed questions</p> <p>Observations on how the staff collectively view what may be their contributions to the student behaviours that are unpreferred</p> <p>Allowing an opening discussion on how to address and support those students with</p>	<p>Thought Exchange crowd sourcing platform.</p> <p>Staff release time to complete question session and debrief responses.</p>	<p>\$0 cost for Thought Exchange to the school budget as the board provided free access to the crowdsourcing resource to be used within the schools to collect data</p> <p>\$0 cost to the school for staff release time as the activity will be hosted within an in school professional development day organized by the school board</p>	Change leader and the school staff members

Goals	Implementation	Resources	Associated Costs	Stakeholders
	behaviour needs, reminding that we as educators are responsible for students, including those with diverse learning needs			
Using a baseline collection tool to determine staff awareness of the being trauma-sensitive and the impact that it can have in children.	During a staff meeting the completion of the Wisconsin Trauma-Sensitive Schools Fidelity Tool (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2020).	Wisconsin Trauma-Sensitive Schools Fidelity Tool (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2020).	\$0 cost to school	Change leader and staff members  Mental Health lead
In school professional learning. Developing an understanding of the School Mental Health ASSIST (SMH - ASSIST) to build capacity to support student mental health and well-being in students. Within the SMH-ASSIST Leading Mentally Healthy Schools - A resource that discusses the Aligned and Integrated Model (AIM) focus on tier one.	During professional development days Working with the board  Mental Health lead who will lead the learning with all staff on becoming familiar with the Tier One of the AIM framework.	SMH-ASSIST (2003) Leading Mentally Healthy Schools - Aligned and Integrated Model (AIM) three-Tiered System.	\$0 cost to school	Change leader and staff members  Mental Health lead

Goals	Implementation	Resources	Associated Costs	Stakeholders
In school professional learning on Applied Behaviour Analysis and Mental health to increase the awareness of how staff may trigger behaviours in students resulting in behaviours that are detrimental	Increased access to ABA and mental health lead board support staff  Increasing involvement of both the ABA lead and mental health lead at team meetings organized to plan next steps for our students demonstrating behaviours that are damaging	ABA staff lead  Mental Health lead	\$0 cost to school budget	ABA lead  Mental health lead  Change leader and staff members
Determine triggers through Functional Behaviour assessment of student behaviours using ABC (Antecedent, Behaviour and Consequences) data collection	ABC data collection in the classroom by support staff to observe any patterns in antecedents that are resulting in unregulated behaviours in students that have been identified in need	ABC data collection sheets  Support staff (EA to collect data)  ABA and mental health leads	\$0 cost to school budget	Change leader and staff members  ABA and mental health leads
Trust building and increased involvement with parents of students with behavioural challenges to support their specific needs	Increased involvement, respect and dignity preserving conversations with parents to build trust and sense of community, support and the common goal of supporting the needs of	Knowledge of and connections to available community agencies	\$0 cost to school budget	Change leader and staff members Community agency service providers

Goals	Implementation	Resources	Associated Costs	Stakeholders
	both parents and their child.  Developing community agencies connections with and for families to aid in access to supports they may want/need (respite, counselling, therapy, food banks, etc.)			names/contacts Parents/student
In school professional learning using the Sanctuary Model (2007). Creating a trauma-informed culture in the school through exposure to the Sanctuary Change Model (Bloom, 2007) and access to two of Dr. Bloom's books focused on developing a culture of being trauma-informed within the school	Develop a deeper understanding of the short- and long-term effects of chronic stress and trauma and how we view problematic behaviours through Bloom's books: Loss, Hurt and Hope: The Complex Issues of Bereavement and Trauma in Children by Vargas and Bloom (2007) and Creating Sanctuary: Toward the Evolution of Sane Societies by Bloom (2017) Weave the seven dominant characteristics of the Sanctuary Model into our ongoing learning to shift mindsets in the school and aid in better supporting students with behavioural challenges	Ongoing learning and exposure to the Sanctuary Model (Bloom, 2007) through our professional development opportunities with staff Creating Sanctuary: Toward the Evolution of Sane Societies by Bloom (2017) Loss, Hurt and Hope: The Complex Issues of Bereavement and Trauma in Children by Vargas and Bloom (2007)	2 books: Total: \$109.76 Creating Sanctuary: Toward the Evolution of Sane Societies by Bloom (2017) \$55.12 Loss, Hurt and Hope: The Complex Issues of Bereavement and Trauma in Children by Vargas and Bloom (2007) \$54.64 cost to school budget	Change leader and staff members  Board Mental Health Lead